

**DEVELOPING RELATIONAL LEADERSHIP WITHIN A CIVIL SERVICE ENTITY:
AN ACTION RESEARCH INQUIRY**

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By

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ABSTRACT

Title: Developing Relational Leadership within a Civil Service Entity: An Action Research Inquiry

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The research draws on relational leadership theory to explore and understand leadership within a departmental context, situated in a wider civil service setting. The underlying premise was to understand how leaders could become more relational and to explore the resultant outcomes of this relationship. In particular, how this relationship is developed and sustained, and what aspects emerge as a result. The research explored the power of conversations or dialogue and how this helps to build relations, in addition to understanding how power works within relational dynamics.

As background, the role of the civil service leader is becoming challenging amid internal and external pressures. There is a renewed interest in leadership as it is viewed that developing leaders could help the organisation achieve its objectives. The relational dynamics with citizens are changing since they are becoming increasingly involved in the decision making processes. The conventional top-down approach to leadership is no longer viable and it calls for alternative ways of thinking about leadership.

The method used fell under the umbrella of action research, namely Participatory Action Research (PAR). This involved co-researchers within a participatory and collaborative framework to explore the research area, and as such a Collaborative Inquiry Team was formed within the department. Data collection included face to face interviews and visual methods such as having participants draw a diagram of what they thought a leader is and explain the image. Results from interviews were analysed and incorporated into planned action interventions to understand what happens to relational theory when it is applied to practice.

The planned interventions were conducted in real time situations, which helped to inform other action interventions to a point of saturation.

The findings revealed a disparity between how leadership is conceptualised by upper and middle management. There is a relational disconnect which fuels on-going frustrations, in particular, the lack of genuine conversations between the two groups. Data revealed reverberations from public sector reform has impacted both groups, and barriers to leadership were identified as being an overly bureaucratic system. Tensions are being felt from power distance relationships, resulting in attitudinal outcomes. Content analysis of drawings captures self-disclosures of participants' conceptualised leadership through metaphorical representations, such as a ship on a rescue mission, a sphere of connectivity, an ant colony, and so forth. These models point to some relational leadership activity between members.

The research adds value to practice as a better understanding is gained of how conversations can be used to create shared meaning and facilitate collective leadership activities, while reducing power distant relationships. It extends understanding of how leadership can be sustained and reciprocated through daily dialogue, in addition to using positioning within conversations. The limitations of the research include generalisability of findings, given that the research was conducted in a single entity within a local public sector context, and may not be relevant to all public sector institutions. Findings of this research should be approached as a source of inquiry, and as an opportunity to engage in further discussions on public sector leadership.

DECLARATION

I, Josette Kimlon Lawrence, declare that the material contained in this thesis has not been previously submitted for any other academic award or qualification. I confirm that this body of work acknowledges the ideas, opinions and contributions drawn upon from other authors, and has been referenced in accordance with the University of Liverpool's referencing standards. The names and all other identifying details of participants have been anonymised. Ethics approval to conduct this research was sought and granted by the University of Liverpool's DBA Research Committee on 31 July 2015.

Signature: Josette Kimlon Lawrence

Date: 3 November 2017

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DEDICATION

To my dad – my strong tower

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

“Leadership is a moving target, and it always will be. If you desire to become a better leader, get comfortable with change.” John C. Maxwell (2005, p. 118).

1.1 Introduction

Finding conclusive answers about leadership has been an arduous and elusive task, as leadership does not embody a single definition (Raelin and Trehan, 2015). Rather, it changes within a particular context and practice in which it is embedded and, leadership constructs continually evolve as the landscape (Raelin and Trehan, 2015) around us shift. This places a myriad of demands and expectations on those who hold both formal and informal leadership roles within the organisation. Within a localised Cayman Islands public sector context the situation is no different. In 2015, on-going leadership issues emerged during a wide scale employee engagement exercise by drawing on representatives from across multiple public sector disciplines. There were several issues identified as it relates to leadership which includes accountability, collaborative and cross-agency leadership, leadership styles, relational concerns, and communication, with relational leadership being the most pressing. Leadership is becoming a critical area of concern, hence the reason why this study focuses on leadership.

As such this research seeks to draw on relational leadership theory to understand and develop leadership within my specific entity context, the main area of concern is how leaders can become more relational? The rationalisation for engaging in this research is that in line with the civil service five (5) year strategic plan, one of the key pillars focuses on leadership, in particular, the development of a cadre of leaders with wide-ranging skills. Thus, my role in the overall process is twofold: (1) as a director within my own organisation I am charged with the responsibility of leading and managing my team; and (2) leadership was highlighted as an area that requires strengthening within the public service as a means of enhancing overall organisational performance. Explicit leadership issues surrounding the typical hierarchical framework have not been successful in developing sustainable relationships. As such, the current approach to leadership warrants redressing and understanding. The implications of

exploring leadership from a relational perspective are that it enables us to look at the problem differently and to explore alternative models for public sector leadership.

Accordingly, my interest in researching the area was stimulated by observing an array of confusing, challenging, yet intriguing behaviours displayed by leaders within my work practice. My doctoral journey within the scholar-practitioner realm was sparked by on-going frustrations, coupled with an innate desire to understand why some leaders were successful in leadership, and why others appeared to fail. Throughout my public service profession, I have encountered leaders who have professed to be leaders but have acted in a contrary manner. Conversely, I have had the opportunity to interact with fellow professionals who were not self-proclaimed leaders; however, there was a clear display of informal leadership capabilities. On the contrary, I have engaged with public service administrators, who displayed a propensity for the conventional command and control style of leadership, where hierarchal systems, rules, protocols, and processes were deeply entrenched.

By the same token, I have met leaders who were more open to adopting a collaborative and participatory framework that would appear to inspire their teams to go the extra mile. However, in attempting to define and make sense of the underlying tenets of leadership, the definition of what constitutes leadership appears to be ambiguous. Arguably, there is an overabundance of research from both a scholarly and practitioner perspective, which one could draw on. However, there is no panacea or blanket approach to leadership applicable to public sector practice. The reason being, by definition, leadership could be described as a complex social phenomenon, devoid of distinct boundaries (Bennis, 1959). Aspiring to find a definitive construct that fully embodies leadership, may be somewhat unattainable. Behn (1998) further asserts that leadership is a critical element in public administration to solve in-built inadequacies. The author goes on to challenge one's thinking by considering the assumptions behind the question posed, which asserts that it is not that public sector leaders or managers should not lead, but rather, consideration should be given as to the type of leadership public sector leaders should be practicing (Behn, 1998). Similarly, from a local context, civil service leaders and managers entered into critical discourse about what change

might mean within practice. Chiefly, how would external and internal factors impact public sector leadership? This, in turn, creates the space, whereby civil service leaders can begin to think about their work practice as more socially constructed, as citizens are becoming increasingly engaged in the decision making process. In short, there is a need to unpack public sector leadership to gain a deeper understanding of what it means and how it is constructed and sustained.

Therefore, relational leadership is an area of concern within my specific working context, and as result, undertaking this research provides an opportunity to explore and understand public sector leadership as a means of engaging not only in problem resolution, but bringing about second and third order change. Conducting this research presents a chance to explore the particularities of relational leadership theory, highlighting specific areas of actionable knowledge that may be relevant to both practitioners and academics. It is the intention of this research to also extend conversations on public sector leadership within a unique Cayman Islands setting. According to O’Leary and Ospina (2016), public administration scholars are presented with an invaluable opportunity to help move the leadership field forward by linking areas of expertise within the various remits, allowing for in-depth insight and understanding to be gained. As such, there is value in engaging in research within my organisational practice as an insider action researcher and dual scholar-practitioner. This positionality incorporates a level of reflexivity by challenging one’s own thinking, while at the same time, challenging taken for granted assumptions within the practice.

Therefore, this chapter considers briefly, theoretical leadership concepts that are applicable to the research question, in addition to the research aims and objectives, concluding with an outline of the thesis. The discussion below will briefly explore the value of setting the research context from an action research perspective.

1.2 Action Research: Context and Relevancy

Action research, according to Coghlan (2001) has two distinctive tasks, which are to bring about organisational change and to generate actionable knowledge. McNiff (2013)

extends understanding by asserting that action research is not only about action, but thinking about action which challenges more complex thought processes about the work practice. Coghlan (2001) opines that action research is a way of challenging status quo from a participatory perspective, offering a platform to re-educate. It provides an effective conjoining of social science and social research; it is a framework to rigorously inquire into my practice and to understand the research problem within its own setting. For example, an essential characteristic of practical knowledge is grounded in the notion of contextualisation in that it will vary from place to place, so what is applicable within my own setting may not be viable in another (Coghlan, 2001). Therefore, it is important to understand the underlying constructs of the research problem presented in this thesis, and the surrounding context. This helps to deepen insight into the research problem, which is within the spirit of action research.

The contextual factors surrounding this research consider that at the heart of any reform agenda is leadership. Mainly as it plays a vital role in the implementation process since it involves people and change (OECD, 2001). Like other public sector industries, triggers adding to the complexity of the Cayman Islands Public Sector could be attributed to technological advancements, financial constraints, socio-economic and environmental challenges, in addition to a pluralist perspective on the delivery of public services. Succinctly put, the public service is undergoing a radical shift, with a call to arms to “steer rather than row” (Denhardt and Denhardt, 2000, p. 549). In 2014, the Cayman Islands Public Sector initiated Phase V of the Public Sector Reform (Cayman Islands Government, 2015), which was the overall rationalisation of public services. Coupled with this seismic shift to modernise (deliver e-government services), in addition to taking a more customer-centric approach to services, agencies were required to begin to think in complex ways that were entrepreneurial, leaner and includes the privatisation of services (Denhardt and Denhardt, 2000). As such, areas of public policy confronting government are becoming progressively multifaceted. With problems residing around national issues such as, but not limited to education, health, immigration, security, environmental and so forth. These issues could be classed as “wicked problems” (Grint, 2005, p. 1473), in that they are multifarious, unstructured, with no finite deadline

(Weber and Khademian, 2008), and they cannot be resolved quickly or by using a linear approach (Grint, 2005; Weber and Khademian, 2008 and Robinson, 2015).

Entity leaders attempting to employ prevailing practices to resolve multidimensional issues that once worked will find that they are no longer viable. Juxtaposed are prevalent practices in implementing public sector reform, drawn from the larger Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries as the exemplars. For example, within the Cayman Islands Public Sector setting, past waves of reform included distinctive moves from 'new public management', where the underlying premise emphasised greater controls, outputs, standards and performance measures, and the adoption of private sector management styles such as more decentralisation at the departmental levels, and so forth. Proponents would argue that the driving forces for such managerial change, represented services that demonstrated value for money and effective use of public resources. In essence, they epitomised the "3Es, economy, efficiency, and effectiveness" (Rhodes, 1994, p. 144). As a result, implementing reform initiatives has led to various austerity measures, rationalisation of services, alternative methods of service delivery such as privatisation, public-private partnerships, contracting out and so forth. Such "wicked problems" (Grint, 2005, p. 1473) require resolutions that are generated through collaborative partnerships, as they are not easily responsive to time-bound interventions. These issues are often unpredictable, immeasurable, and may have an indelible impact on other policy remits. Challenges facing public sector leaders are immense, and the role of the public sector leader is evolving. Therefore, drawing on Bourgon's (2007) alternative notion of democratic citizenship provides an innovative way for public sector leaders to be responsive to users' expectations.

Bourgon's (2007) model suggests four definitive components, which is antithetical to the traditional public administrator's role of following orders. The framework seeks to build collaborative relationships with citizens; foster shared responsibilities; distribute information to increase public dialogue working towards a better understanding of public concerns; and increase public participation in government activities. In this vein, leadership within the evolving public sector landscape becomes the driving force to enact and ensure successful

public sector outcomes. Arguably, operating within this context, leaders need to have a repertoire of skills that allow them to move beyond the conventional command and control bureaucratic models, towards a more democratic framework that facilitates citizen engagement (Robinson, 2015). We can begin to see how leadership is changing to be more relational, in other words, building relationships not only with citizens but with public servants as primary stakeholders.

Accordingly, Osbourn, et al. (2002), purports that the effectiveness of leadership is partly determined by the context in which it is situated. This then opens discourse to challenge taken for granted assumptions about what constitutes effective public sector leadership? What does public sector leadership mean within this given context and does everybody understand it the same way? What systems need to change for leaders to be more effective? Unaddressed, the above questions may continue to add to endemic tensions surrounding uncertainty regarding the direction of leadership, what it means, and how it is understood collectively.

The above represents some of the driving factors that led me to consider action research, namely PAR as a suitable approach for undertaking this study. As leadership acts unfold from the mundane everyday activities, coupled with the inter-subjective nature of how we understand leadership, we create a fertile ground to explore relational leadership in action. This allows us to gain in-depth insight on what is occurring in practice from people's experiences, relations, and social interactions. The question to then ask is how can we improve engagement with leaders (formal and informal) within the civil service?

PAR is relevant to this thesis because it enables us to engage in targeted learning by focusing on the leadership problem to bring about change. Additionally, it allows for a collective approach to problem resolution, and critical reflection as a collective whole, where over the entire research process there are elements of mutuality and sustainability in learning (Raelin and Trehan, 2015). Moreover, PAR is a meaningful way to learn and to have civil servants as the practitioners, involved in the decision-making process that may impact and change the operational landscape in which they work. PAR is an effective change management

tool whereby it elicits first and second order change not just in the individual as the manager researcher, but also with the team in which the action research inquiry is taking place (Coghlan, 2001). Notwithstanding, civil servants should be allowed to make a valued contribution and help to shape how leadership is understood and practiced, which is closely aligned to their own value and belief system.

As mentioned above, PAR is a suitable method to research leadership because it fosters conditions for civil servants to understand and discover new ways of working from within (Raelin and Trehan, 2015). Participants will all share a common goal, be fluent in the organisational dialogue, in addition to contributing to a critical discourse that will help to shape the organisational practice. Another important aspect of using PAR is the notion of researching from a community of practice concept, which is in alignment with the points underscored in the civil service five (5) year strategic plan, whereby there is a collective responsibility to understand, learn and grow oneself and one's practice. Hence, the overall issues with leadership that will be researched in this thesis focus on areas highlighted in the literature review on relational leadership, in particular how we think about what effective leadership looks like and relational ideas of how we are leading. This helps to define the line of study to be followed.

1.3 Scholar-Practitioner Role

In alignment with action research, my position is one of a dual scholar-practitioner in that I am a full member of my agency and a scholar engaged in conducting research within my practice. The research begins with first person inquiry. It offers glimpses of a storyline that is interlinked with this research. As I zoom in and out, interacting with the research at different angles, I am demonstrating the interplay between my past experiences, assumptions, values, beliefs, and how knowledge about something can be known within its work practice context (Coghlan, 2001). I have positioned myself, not as detached or value-free as an outsider, but rather as an insider (Coghlan, 2001; Evered and Louis, 1981). I am playing a dual role of how one practitioner went about discovering actionable knowledge about their craft wearing their academic hat.

However, I am cognisant that as a manager conducting research within my own organisation comes with potential drawbacks, given my pre-understanding of the organisational issue. I am mindful that there is room for biases and preconceived notions to surface. Therefore, I have opted to keep a reflexive journal which allows me to step back and reflect on the overall process, including my thinking and inactions or actions that were taken. Another area which becomes prevalent was the organisational politics, as this required finding balance between institutional demands from the research and my own political activities (Coghlan, 2001) for conducting this research. In order to navigate the above, I had to develop a keen sense of political awareness of the various actors and their roles or interest in the research area to keep me grounded.

I see parallels with issues relating to role duality when drawing on examples from Coghlan (2001), as it relates to relational complexities that I faced. This stemmed from the dual role I played as a Director in my department conducting research while enlisting my subordinates to be involved as the Collaborative Inquiry Team. This was overcome by drawing on my own leadership approach, which is more relational. As an agency Director for over eight (8) years, I have made a concerted effort to be collaborative, while valuing and building relations with my team. This helped when we needed to have open, frank and free-flowing discussions. By the same token, I was aware of groupthink, and the possibility for consensus building with me as the Director, therefore, I enlisted the assistance of two members of my team that were not part of the Collaborative Inquiry Team to act as a counterbalance during data collection and analysis.

1.4 Framing the Research

Terry Larry (1995), in his book *Leadership of Public Bureaucracies: The Administrator as Conservator* made a keen observation. He noted the neglect of theory specifically related to the public sector or administrative leadership. Similarly, Kellerman and Webster (2001, p. 485) in their review of the literature on public leadership, observed that “an enormous amount of work remains to be done before the literature on public leadership reaches a critical mass”. Although the authors’ assessment primarily focused on the development of leadership within

the political sphere, they emphasised the high quality of work that was produced on public leadership. However, the body of work was amorphous as there was no connectivity. In his recent review of public sector leadership, Van Wart (2013b) arrived at a number of conclusions, which has contributed in shaping mainstream public sector leadership research agenda: What should leaders focus on: development of human resources or organisational performance? To what extent does leadership makes a difference (when and how much)? What is the best leadership style to use? Are leaders born or made? How and where is public leadership separate from general ideas of organisational leadership? Many of these questions continue to be influential in shaping how leadership is constructed, understood, and actioned. Particularly, how it informs the development of actionable knowledge for practice improvements.

In a report by the Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD, 2001), they found that member countries showed a common gap between how public sectors are now, and their desired state in terms of both current and future national interest. The report reflected that all countries demonstrated that past reform initiatives made an attempt to align public services to meet the needs of society (OECD, 2001). However, there was a crucial element missing which was highlighted by each country, which was “promoting a certain kind of leadership” (OECD, 2001, p. 12). Normative intervention trends adopted by many OECD countries to address the leadership gap included the development of leadership programmes. Van Wart’s (2013b) assessment showed that with advances in administrative leadership research, there were many theoretical models which practitioners could draw on, some include the conventional hierarchal, command and control, administrative leadership style (Chapman and O’Toole, 2010); distributed leadership (Spillane, Halverson and Diamond, 2007); collective leadership (Brookes, 2006); and leader-follower relationships (Oberfield, 2012). As there is no one best way to develop a leadership model or programme, the OECD (2001) in their report on member country experiences, observed several drawbacks with their developmental programmes. They suggested that leadership should be approached by considering it within its context and the categories of problems confronted, combined with a clear strategy to assess challenges on a national scale (OECD, 2001).

Notwithstanding, O’Leary and Ospina (2016), asserts that there still remains two significant issues with public sector leadership research, despite progressions made. There is a gap in knowledge that continues to be a concern for both scholars and practitioners, which is the limited conceptualisation of public sector leadership. Therefore, the challenge is to widen the scope and to restate the unique perspective of the publicness of public sector leadership studies. The implications for public sector practitioners are that they are in a unique position to add to conversations on leadership, in particular, relational leadership theories (O’Leary and Ospina, 2016).

1.5 Aims and Objectives of the Research

The aims of this project were to understand and influence public sector leadership by implementing leadership activities within practice for a more leaderful and collective understanding of public sector leadership. Therefore, the research objectives as informed by the extant literature were to work collaboratively with colleagues (using an action research approach) which seeks to use interview interventions and visual methods to work with colleagues to understand and explore leadership experiences (Kellerman and Webster, 2001), and meanings attached to those experiences.

- Work collaboratively to gain a clearer understanding of public sector leadership within a Cayman Islands context through leadership activities.
- Explore leadership from an evolving public sector context (Getha-Taylor, et al., 2011), and its impact of those changes on the leadership experience by drawing on interview interventions, visual methods and using action interventions within practice.

Thus, as influenced by the literature on relational leadership theory, and as directed by the objectives, this research endeavours to address the central question, *‘to what extent could principles of relational leadership theory be applied through action interventions to the public sector in the Cayman Islands to extend understanding of how leadership is constructed and*

operationalised within practice to ensure that leaders are taking the right approach to meet challenges ahead?’ More specifically:-

- How is leadership constructed, understood and enacted within practice between the various organisational members, and how is that relationship sustained over time?
- What factors influence that relationship, and how can issues be dealt with by using effective dialogue?
- How do leadership activities surface during dynamic interactions between organisational members?
- To what extent does the changing public sector environment influence how leadership is understood and enacted within practice.

As we reposition ourselves to think of leadership as an emerging concept within the practice, we find empathy within relational leadership theory. This position offers a paradigmatic shift in thinking from the conventional leadership models that seem to be linear and determinative, and they may not be fit for purpose. Having a change in mind-set by embracing relational leadership concepts and engaging in complex thinking allows room for various representations on a situation to be explored and understood (Gershenson and Heylighen, 2004). This is resounded by the notion that some of the leadership models may be insufficient for exploring, and fully addressing dynamic interactions (Lichtenstein and Plowman, 2009), collective leadership (Avolio, Walumbwa, and Weber, 2009), and managing continuous change.

1.6 Rationale

This research endeavours to shed greater insight into the limitations of conventional leadership research within a public sector entity in the unique setting of the Cayman Islands. Traditionally, leadership was understood from two positional outcomes: leader emergence and effectiveness. In other words, how leaders were chosen and how well they functioned (Cherulink, Donley, Wiewel and Miller, 2001). Additionally, conventional leadership theories

appear to have been rooted in the industrial age, where organisations, for example, like the public sector were, more stagnant. However, such models, although useful, are no longer adequate for dealing with multifaceted and complex public sector issues. Uhl-Bein, Marion, and McKelvey (2007), asserted that in spite of the increasing demands placed on organisations within the information age, much of the leadership theory remains deeply grounded in these assumptions, for example, one perspective is that “control must be rationalised” (Uhl-Bien, Marion and McKelvey, 2007, p. 301).

Weberg (2012) draws similar conclusions, noting that there are three issues with conventional leadership paradigms: linear thinking, organisational cultural consciousness, and not being adequately prepared for innovation. Most relevant to this research is the concept of leaders as linear thinkers, primarily because it would appear that they are operating from a paradigm of single loop learning, and not engaging in either double loop or triple loop learning. According to Weberg (2012), the underlying assumption of linear models is that they operate from the standpoint that inputs into a system will produce equivalent outputs.

Contrastingly, Nirenberg (2001) offers a practitioner’s perspective on leadership gaps. The author emphasised that when considering what aspects of one’s job would be considered leadership or management, it is likely that the shift would move more towards leadership. This paradigmatic shift could be explained as being driven by the assumption that knowledge-based organisations will need greater levels of interpersonal talks, collaborative and consultative efforts between agents, who are not expected to liaise as part of a normal business (Nirenberg, 2001). In addition, there may be a rise in networking required with practical outcomes of inspiring and influencing (Nirenberg, 2001); in this instance, leadership would have to become a part of everyday life, where we transcend from doing leadership to being leaders.

Parallels could be drawn here with Tsoukas and Chia’s (2002) framework for embracing organisational change, where the underlying principle is to move from a planned approach to change towards a methodology, where one makes room for new experiences. Arguably, this may call for leaders, and by extension managers, to become more deliberate, taking

purposeful action by challenging traditional ways of working, biases and ingrained assumptions, as it relates to thinking about public sector leadership.

Given the challenges confronting public sector leaders, the implications of this research are not only the added value to public sector practitioners, but more so for the scholarly community to gain additional insight on public sector leadership from a relational perspective. This is in alignment with the conceptualisation that leadership is relational, albeit socially constructed in that it is subjective and constantly evolving. Therefore, I have selected action research as it allows us to engage in problem resolution collectively, while bringing about change through the various action research cycles, hence effecting change within the organisational practice. Additionally, it allows the researcher and co-researchers to test the plausibility of elements of relational leadership theory within the practice, and most importantly which areas are not relevant to the current context.

1.7 Thesis Outline

Chapter two, the literature review provides an in-depth discussion of key concepts relating to the research area. While chapter three engages in discussion on the methodology, research design, methods of inquiry, and the ontology and epistemology, which align with the overall action research framework.

Chapter four provides a sequential layout of how the various phases of the Participatory Action Research (PAR) cycles were enacted within the practice. Chapter five is the evaluation of outcomes or findings from the research and subsequent discussion.

Chapter six is the concluding chapter, and it provides some final points of recommendations and benefits of relational leadership theory for advancing public sector leadership. This chapter highlights limitations of this research, and suggests areas for future research, in addition to a reflective piece of writing which provides insights on the overall research process and my development as a scholar practitioner.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

The preceding chapter presented the research setting in relation to the organisation under study, highlighting the unique geographical and cultural context of a localised public sector organisation. Chapter one outlined the research aims, objectives, and justifications for the research inquiry, in addition to the overall research question to be addressed. The research area is focused on gaining deeper meaning of public sector leadership and the research objectives could be summarised into two broad overarching objectives:

1. To understand how leadership is constructed, understood, and operationalised within practice, and;
2. To explore and understand the relational dynamics of leadership, in particular, complex social responses and how those dynamics are developed and sustained within practice over time.

Accordingly, the literature review concentrates on the contextual factors surrounding leadership within a modernised and evolving public sector environment. It will first examine the fundamental tenets of leadership, and woven into this discourse will be both academic and scholarly perspectives, where feasible. The literature review will attempt to bring together common perspectives on leadership, while at the same time consider areas of contention. Secondly, the literature review will set the platform to further explore leadership from a public sector context by teasing out how leadership is understood and defined. Thirdly, the literature review will delve deeper into the salient factors of leadership by looking at the progression of leadership theory, in addition to considering how we can begin to think more complex about leadership by drawing on principles from relational leadership theory as an alternative perspective. Finally, the literature review will set the stage for the Methodology and Research Design chapter.

2.2 Literature Review

This section will provide a brief account of the approach taken for the literature review. It is not meant to give an exhaustive step by step explanation of the entire process that was undertaken, but rather to demonstrate methodical robustness, transparency, and to show the quality of decisions made throughout the thesis.

Tranfield, Denyer, and Smart (2003) asserted that management reviews have been criticised for lacking critical evaluation, in addition to being deficient in both relevance and rigour. Therefore, to produce a literature review that would be considered good quality, I drew on the principles of the systematic review, a positivist evidence-based approach used by our counterparts in the medical sciences field (Tranfield, Denyer, and Smart, 2003). The systematic review consisted of three main stages (planning, conducting, reporting and dissemination of the review), which were contextualised as required. Although this framework sits squarely within the positivist epistemology, the benefits of using it are twofold: (1) it allows for robustness and relevance, and (2) it is fit for purpose as dictated by the research agenda. The rationalisation for selection is that there is a harmonisation between methodical rigour and practical relevance. This will enable me to persist within the interpretivist paradigm, stay true to the parallel reflexive dialogue (storyline) and the action research approach.

The leadership phenomenon is a highly contested, diverse, but a well-researched subject area exploring various aspects of leadership over several eras. The plethora of academic literature available offers a comprehensive and overarching view of leadership. Thus, a challenging feat for any novice researcher is to interact and make sense of a wide range of topics, epistemological and ontological perspectives, methodological approaches, opinions, and evidence-based responses relating to how leadership is perceived and from what angle. As a means of carefully navigating through the extant literature on leadership, the overarching goal of this thesis is to address the main question, *‘to what extent could principles of relational leadership theory be applied through action interventions to the public sector in the Cayman Islands to extend understanding of how leadership is constructed and operationalised within*

practice to ensure that leaders are taking the right approach to meet challenges ahead?', which will set the research parameters.

2.3 Defining Leadership

Acknowledging that leadership in its simplest form could be understood as the ability to influence others. Stogdill (1950, p. 4) defines leadership as, "the process (act) of influencing the activities of an organised group in its efforts toward goal setting and goal achievement". Although this definition emerged almost sixty years ago, aspects of this definition of leadership still hold true today, and perhaps most importantly, it offers a starting point to better understand the principles of leadership. The definition provided by Stogdill (1950), seems to capture a more linear framework of leadership, but it does not appear to account for the emergence of relational leadership within various levels of the organisation. It is recognised, however, that what constitutes leadership, or what is meant by the term leadership, is somewhat encumbered by various definitions, meanings, and interpretations. Kellerman and Webster (2001) in their appraisal of current literature on public sector leadership, asserts that within the field of leadership research, there is no consensus, common interpretation or "meaning-making" of the term, which appears to be somewhat problematic (p. 486).

Correspondingly, Van Wart (2013a) offers support for this point, as he observed that leadership is a multidimensional concept, one that is ever changing amid different issues, contextual factors, tools, and concepts. Endeavouring to tease out the 'what is' or the 'how to do' leadership, especially within a public sector environment, Osborn, Hunt and Jauch (2002), extends understanding through their interpretation of leadership, noting that leadership, within a given context, may signify dissimilar things to dissimilar people. The conclusion could be drawn that contextual factors may play a significant role in how leadership is understood and enacted. Arguably, it would appear that finding a concise definition of what constitutes leadership may be somewhat subjective, depending on where one is sitting (Van Wart, 2013a), and what is occurring at a given point in time. For example, within the public sector landscape, leadership could be viewed from the standpoint of an administrative context, given the nature of the business. To expound on this point, conventional debates on leadership show

commonalities in their approach as to how leadership is studied. This includes exploring leadership from various theoretical concepts such as individual leadership, administrative leadership, specific leadership traits, public leadership, transactional and transformational leadership and so forth (Avolio, Walumbwa, and Weber, 2009; Van Wart, 2003; Oberfield, 2012; Higgs, 2003).

At this juncture, it would be remiss not to make a distinction regarding the term 'leader' and 'leadership'. For the purposes of this thesis, the term 'leader', is understood as a person who generates or strives to establish levels of change – big or small. Within this context, the leader(s) may or may not hold positions of authority in the organisation (Kellerman and Webster, 2001). Leadership, on the other hand, could be viewed as a dynamic process, one that may have to be constantly reviewed and re-interpreted, given the contextual circumstances. This may enable organisations to determine what model of leadership is required, given the complexities of the institution, in addition to considering both internal and external pressures – at a particular point in time. In this instance, the need may arise to evaluate circumstances, internal processes, and structures, as a view of leadership being “contextually bound” (Osborn, Hunt and Jauch, 2002, p. 802). It could possibly mean moving back and forth through a leadership continuum, dependent on the situation until the right fit or leadership model is found. With this in mind, the notion of how leadership is perceived could be broadened, with a view of embodying an ideological perspective that is “dyadic, shared, relational, strategic, and global and a complex social dynamic” (Avolio, Walumbwa, and Weber, 2009, p. 423; Avolio, 2007). This definition of leadership is congruent with Nirenberg’s (2001) worldview, whereby leadership is described as being an explicit social phenomenon, that is relational (between people), for the drive towards the accomplishment of mutually constructed objectives. The resultant outcome is viewed as collective efficiency and individual improvement (Nirenberg, 2001).

However, when making a comparison to the relational definition of leadership provided by Uhl-Bien (2006), which is interpreted as being socially constructed and emergent. This definition of leadership is further expanded and refined to include a strong emphasis on the

relational dynamics. A point of caution is made here, as the author noted that the relational leadership concept is relatively novel, and it may be open to additional interpretation (Uhl-Bien, 2006). Nonetheless, the strength of taking this approach is that leadership could be re-conceptualised to embody aspects of public sector leadership not considered by taking a universalistic or nonconformist approach.

A shortfall of the above is that it does not take into account the customary institutional and management structures that may be prevalent in many government agencies. The problem then might be the complex interplay between adopting a relational model for public sector business, which may, in turn, further compound areas of leadership concern. For example, the application of various leadership models within the public sector has had a degree of success; however, the nature of public sector business is somewhat different from that of the private sector in that the public sector is primarily concerned with delivering services, whereas the private sector focuses on the bottom line. In the Cayman Islands, specific aspects of leadership are generic, in that the particular model of leadership stems from a hierarchal bureaucratic perspective. Therefore at the very least, there should be models that can be explicitly applied, or address inherent leadership problems within the public sector (O’Rafferty, et al., 2008). It is implicitly implied here that the context of how one studies or views leadership is essential. In support of this point, Osbourn, Hunt, and Jauch (2002) purport that attempting to detach a leader(s) from their contextual environment, could be akin to “separate[ing] flavor from food” (p. 799). This then presupposes the importance of exploring how leadership is studied, within a specific context, and over a period of time, may enhance its applicability for a particular business sector.

Although there are commonalities in definitions explored above, Van Wart (2013a) makes a valid point through his assertion that the concept of leadership is complex. The author went on to highlight a disparity in researching leadership, by noting that as scholars acknowledge the difficulties in defining leadership, issues are often inverted as they attempt to take the angle of being “comprehensive or situationally precise” (Van Wart, 2013a, p. 554). This dichotomy presupposes that there is a gap in the current perceptions of how leadership is

envisioned or studied, and what the reality may be within the practice, particularly as it relates to public sector entities. In efforts to close this gap, Van Wart (2013a) asserts that practitioners should consider the perspective of leadership they wish to assume for their particular needs, in addition to being clear as to which set of assumptions they are willing to accept and why.

Reflecting on the literature reviewed thus far, an observation emerging from this is that scholars and practitioners were inclined to focus on their area of interest and explored leadership from their own perspective, or a segment of leadership that was particularly interesting to them. As a case in point, this research will primarily focus on public sector leadership and undoubtedly there will be areas surrounding the leadership phenomenon that will be left unexplored. However, the aim is not to discover the complexities of public sector leadership within a restrictive framework, but rather to use the lenses of relational leadership theory to dig deeper into the leadership phenomenon and to shed light on what is happening within the practice. Taking this stance will allow the research to evolve within the spirit of the action research approach.

2.4 Origins and Scope of Leadership

There has been a resurgence surrounding the importance of leadership as the driving force to sustain public sector success. Therefore, in efforts to situate this research within the dominant views on leadership and to demonstrate how the literature has shaped the direction of the research, exploring the origins and scope of leadership will help to provide a foundational platform to enhance our understanding of leadership. Accordingly, the concept of leadership within the public sector will be briefly explored from the positions of trait theory, situational theories, transaction and transformational theories. The rationalisation is that the above leadership models were prevalent in public sector institutions as a means of addressing questions such as ‘what style of leadership was most appropriate?’ or more specifically what model of leadership would be suitable, ‘is there one best leadership style that exists?’, ‘are public sector leaders born or made?’ and ‘what is public sector leadership?’ (Orazi, Turrini and Valotti, 2013; Wallis and McLoughlin, 2007; Van Wart, 2003). Moreover, the central purpose of engaging in discussions about the aforementioned theoretical perspectives is that they provide

the backdrop for understanding how leadership was first conceptualised and thereby enacted within public sector organisations. Additionally, the above themes provide the backing to extrapolate deficiencies in theories applied to public sector organisations, thus making a case to explore alternative leadership concepts that may add value.

2.5 Leadership Style

The literature on public sector leadership, when examining an appropriate leadership style to use, posits that good leaders demonstrate areas of approachability and accessibility; they are personable and they inspire (Kearney, 2008). Competency is exhibited in managing relationships at various levels throughout the organisation, and they use personal power as opposed to positional power (Kearney, 2008). A resulting outcome from the above leadership behaviour demonstrates an association with organisational effectiveness, principally as Kearney (2008) asserted that leaders operating within the above construct are able to effectively tap into individual and team efforts, with the resulting outcome of delivering high performance.

It could be deduced that although the above appears to be a bit opaque, it is implicitly implied that within the public sector remit, the model for leadership could be understood as being grounded in a fundamental concept stemming from behavioural and personality traits, which would seem to denote a correlation to organisational effectiveness. Discussions does not account for other variables that may attribute to organisational effectiveness, such as emergent leadership or behavioural styles that facilitate collaboration.

Perennial debates focused on the usefulness or applicability of trait theories and its inherent limitations. However, as a means of addressing some of these shortcomings, scholars considered an aggregate model of leadership style and behaviours (Yukl, 1989). This led to the emergence of behavioural and situational theories (Higgs, 2003; Van Wart, 2003; Yukl, 1989; Stodgill, 1950). Based on the literature, it would appear that this conceptualised framework was an attempt to extend leadership understanding, as advocates of this ideology contended that there is value in seeing leadership style as a cumulative effort, whereby the leader has a repertoire of skills, characteristics, traits, and behaviours to draw from, dependent on the

circumstances. Congruent with this line of thinking, Van Wart (2003), in his observations, highlighted that certain characteristics were seen as being essential or key, for example, leader influence and power typologies.

Work by Alimo-Metcalfe (2010) made an attempt to understand leadership constructs by examining leadership styles adopted by both male and female leaders, as a means of challenging underlying perceptions, as it relates to leadership style and gender bias. It was deduced that the underlying precept emerging from this research is the notion of one 'best' style (Alimo-Metcalfe, 2010), which subsequently seems to have limitations, as there may be other contextual factors at play. For example, consideration of how leaders function, within a particular context may influence the leadership style selected at that time. In efforts to provide an example from practice, within the public sector, a senior leader of a police entity may adopt a more authoritarian style, whereby a senior leader working within education may take a more adaptive leadership style to assist with the mobilising team members to tackle messy problems.

As a means of further dissecting the above dichotomies on leadership style, Van Wart (2003), summated that much of the leadership research explored leadership style in correlation to function. In essence, leaders have to operationalise the organisational agenda(s) through employee resources. The key here is to consider the manner in how they mobilised these efforts, or perhaps how they find equilibrium between leading people and achieving specific outcomes, which then could be considered their 'style' (Van Wart, 2003). Discrepancies in leadership style theory acted as the vehicle to advance the understanding, and to promote the development of leadership concepts, by filtering much of what we know about leadership through the lenses of contingency theories (Higgs, 2003). The model by Hersey and Blanchard (Hersey, Blanchard and Natemeyer, 1979) provides a standardised framework for understanding how leaders manoeuvred through various quadrants, by having an acute awareness of their followers. Moreover, leaders adjusted their leadership styles dependent on the maturity of their followers. Key assumptions surfacing from this methodology was the leader's ability to adapt to their leadership style based on their followers needs, notwithstanding, this perspective explored leadership from the follower's standpoint (Higgs,

2003). Yukl (1989) asserted that although situational theories have been heavily utilised, it has primarily been within the remit of management workshops, but not particularly popular with leadership scholars.

When making a comparison, it is implicitly implied that trait theories focused more on effective selection, while behaviour and situational theories concentrated heavily on capabilities. In terms of the effectiveness of either approach, Alimo-Metcalfe's (2010) research demonstrates that such normative debates do not offer a solid or consistent construct that is applicable across a wide array of contexts. This, however, allowed room for other scholars to contribute to the growing body of knowledge by strengthening leadership models, and by investigating transactional and transformational frameworks as a way of revitalising organisations.

2.6 Transactional and Transformational Leadership

The manner in which leadership developments continued to progress within the public sector sphere could be observed through the transactional and transformational leadership models. At the core of transformational leadership is the notion that the leader takes an active role in influencing a change in attitudes and behaviours of followers, generating organisational commitment amongst members (Yukl, 1989). In short, transformational leadership could be framed as "the leader's effect on followers, and the behaviour used to achieve this effect" (Yukl, 1999, p. 286). Moreover, resulting outcomes of transformational leadership attributed to the mobilisation of major change efforts involving the transformation of the organisation at a cultural or strategic level, in addition to affecting change within social systems (Yukl, 1989). Consistent with these concepts, Bass and Avolio (1993) asserted that within extremely innovative and fulfilling organisational cultures, transformational leaders draw on assumptions of shared leadership, with the notion of resolving complex issues at the lowest levels. Leaders within this framework tend to display a sense of clear vision and purpose to their followers (Bass and Avolio, 1993). The underlying principle is that transformational leaders elicit a sense of empowerment amongst followers; they are able to align them with the overall organisational

strategy. Within this framework, it could be deduced that leaders are moving through a continuum of roles, from that of a coach, or facilitator to a teacher.

At this stage, transformational leadership models appeared to be addressing the relational gap in leadership, whereby leaders are able to connect people to their organisations in a profound way, stimulating a clear sense of purpose, and by extension, this may result in feelings of follower satisfaction. As a supporting argument, Higgs (2003) attributes transformational leadership with the ability to inspire, provide intellectual stimulus, and focus on the individual, accounting for followers' needs. Contrastingly, transactional leadership could be defined as a "process of leader-subordinate exchange" (Yukl, 1999, p. 289) or daily operational activities between leader and follower (Van Wart, 2013a). The mechanisms of the transactional leadership model could be diagrammatically depicted as a triangle, whereby the leader operates within the constructs of "passive management by exception, active management by exception, and contingent reward" (Oberfield, 2012).

In explicating the differences between transformational and transactional leadership models, Bass and Avolio (1993) show that dissimilarities reside around the notion of exchange. For example, employee reward is dependent on performance, and working cooperatively is contingent on negotiations, devoid of a common mission, or purpose. It could be deduced that operating within this leadership sphere places the emphasis on an individualistic perspective, as opposed to working collaboratively. Unlike the transformational models, working from the transactional perspective appears to be a bit constraining as followers are not given a sense of organisational identity, or opportunities to work innovatively and creatively. Van Wart (2013a) opines that within the public service, the transactional leadership model could be useful if the right balance could be found between enacting suitable levels of decision making with correct aspects of decentralisation and centralisation. However, a notable limitation with this framework is that it may have been better suited as a leadership model when the public sector was more static during the 1950s and 1970s (Van Wart, 2013a).

Prior to moving onto other leadership perspectives, it may be useful at this juncture to take a moment to revert back to the transformational leadership framework, as it will set the

stage to explore inconsistencies with other leadership constructs. When considering the value of the transactional leadership framework for the public service, empirical research suggests that incorporating transactional leadership exhibits a myriad of positive institutional outcomes (Oberfield, 2012). For instance, Lowe and Kroeck (1996), in their meta-analysis of the research on transformational leadership, used the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) and found correlations between organisational effectiveness and transformational leadership. Results were inconclusive, however, when examining the organisational effectiveness and transactional leadership. Although transformational leadership theories were noted to have a slow uptake within the public sector (Van Wart, 2003), commonalities surrounding the relevance of the transformational leadership was shown by Moynihan, Pandey, and Wright (2012, p. 144). In their research, they sought to develop a conceptual model to illustrate connections between transformational leadership and “performance information use”. The resulting outcome of the study was a theoretical development, showing a positive correlation between transformational leadership and “performance information use”, drawing on two mediating variables, that of organisational culture and goal clarity (Moynihan, Pandey and Wright, 2012, p. 158).

By way of contrast, although it may be reasonable to deduce that both transformational and transactional leadership theories seem to have filled in the gaps from earlier leadership models, and may be highly relevant to the public service, Orazi, Turrini and Valotti (2013) purports that transformational leaders are thought to be less effective in a public sector setting than the private sector. Contenders of the transformational model demonstrated innate limitations, citing severe conceptual flaws, for example, underlying influence processes were not clearly described, nor was it explicitly stated as to how the leader’s behaviour was associated with these processes (Yukl, 1999). In exploring the implications behind transformational and transactional leadership for the public service, based on the literature, it would appear that the focus was taken away from the leader and placed within the remit of the followers. There are elements of shared and collaborative leadership, coupled with aspects of networking emerging, where followers are inspired to seek out innovative and creative ways of working. The evolution of the leadership phenomenon, shows the leader moving from a

command and control setting, towards a model that is showing seeds of leadership that is emergent, with active participation by agents within the system.

2.7 Public Sector Leadership

As a starting point, it is recognised as mentioned in the Introduction Chapter that much of the literature on leadership within a public sector context has been scarce (Liddle, 2010; Van Wart, 2013b; Van Wart, 2003; Orazi, Turrini and Valotti, 2013). However, there is a revival of studies on public sector leadership, indicating a growing interest from both scholars and practitioners. Engagement with the literature demonstrates that within the public service remit, much of the literature on leadership focused primarily on the political aspect of leadership (Liddle, 2010). Attempting to fill the gaps, Kellerman and Webster (2001), conducted a review of recent literature on public leadership. The authors explore aspects of leadership by examining individuals, groups/organisations, national, transnational, in addition to cross-cutting subjects such as ethics and diversity (Kellerman and Webster, 2001).

A point of caution is that although the above investigation sought to provide a comprehensive understanding of leadership without being too prescriptive, Kellerman and Webster (2001, p. 511) observed that there may not be a “critical mass of work” within the field of leadership research, specifically exploring leadership within the public sector. A possible justification for that is we may be looking at a paucity of literature from the wrong angle (Kellerman and Webster, 2001), for instance, there are studies available on public sector leadership, but the field of thought on public leadership is separated. Orazi, Turrini, and Valotti (2013) in their recent review of public sector leadership research posited that public sector leadership research appears to be a growing stream of research to which the authors classified as “distinctive and autonomous” (p. 497). Orazi, Turrini, and Valotti (2013) further advocated that this on-going debate on public sector leadership remains underdeveloped when compared to other strands of research, for example, business studies.

Another observation is that even though there is a growing body of work on public leadership, it appears to be just that, a body of research, without any clear links (Kellerman and

Webster, 2001). Broadly speaking, it could be deduced that researchers have not made an effort to tie their work in with other authors in the public leadership field (Kellerman and Webster, 2001). Therefore, much of the work conducted appears to be fragmented or focused on distinct issues without any real connections. That said there is still much work to be conducted before research on public sector leadership has fully saturated or achieved a state of “critical mass” (Kellerman and Webster, 2001, p. 511; Van Wart, 2013b). By way of contrast, a criticism of the above approach taken by Kellerman and Webster (2001), noted limitations, citing that research was concentrated mainly on the advancement of community and political leadership (Van Wart, 2013b). Even so, the research conducted did little to change the nebulous state of public sector leadership studies, and substantial challenges were perceived as demonstrating an inability to reconcile differences between scholarship works that is descriptive in nature from work that is prescriptive (Van Wart, 2013b).

Prior to advancing this discussion, it is a good point to pause and consider briefly, the differences between the private and public sector landscape, as this would provide the backdrop to explore and locate the notion of public sector leadership within the extant literature. To offer a comparison, Ingraham (2009), maintains that there are significant commonalities in the business of public and private sector agencies, however, the overarching inquiry is to consider the level of distinction as it relates to the differences. One case in point is to look at developmental areas in public and private sector leadership research, which may undoubtedly show that progression within both sectorial regions are almost parallel (Ingraham, 2009). Conversely, public sector leadership research is differentiated on aspects of the application of empirical testing, and adaptations to leadership models as it relates to public service entities (Ingraham, 2009). In reflection, factors noted above could impact the advancement of public sector leadership research, if an exploration of similarities and differences are considered, and to what degree is leadership researched and applied within the various contexts. For example, contextual differences in the business landscape for public sector institutions, could act either as a catalyst or barrier when applying variables such as, governance structures, flexibility in rewards systems, stakeholder involvement (Ingraham, 2009; Getha-Taylor, et al. 2011), role ambiguity (Orazi, Turrini and Valotti, 2013), and so forth.

When comparing points of discussion by looking at differences between how leadership is approached and studied in the public sector, Van Wart (2013b) provides a diametrically opposing view. The ensuing discussions draw heavily on the work of Van Wart (2013b), for example, the “dissimilar-purpose” view (Van Wart, 2013b, p.533), offers a point of demarcation, by noting that public sector entities are controlled, and authorised through legal frameworks, with a mandate of mobilising service delivery for the public good, sustained over long-term goals. Conversely, private sector institutions are driven by market demands as the founding principles for creating and controlling its business, they are customer-centric, and goals are short-term (Van Wart, 2013b). Parallels are drawn by Chapman, et al., (2015), and points emerging earlier in this chapter, for example, the authors highlighted some differentiating factors such as public sector leadership character, operations, and jurisdictions. In terms of foundational similarities, arguably, there is a varying thesis that public sector agencies should operate more like private businesses, which stems from the underlying concept of the New Public Sector Management Reform Agenda (Van Wart, 2013b).

The fundamental drive for enacting the above reform was primarily for the improvement of public goods and services (Van Wart, 2013b). Other similarities include the method for problem resolution, which has an apparent emergent framework, which can be seen surfacing during occasions when the need arises for a public-private partnership, for example, during attempts to resolve crisis situations (Van Wart, 2013b). Arguably, the above assessment allows one to take stock, to determine how value is placed within the public sphere of leadership, to explore the basis by which leadership assumptions are made, and to elicit a reflective stance in addressing questions, as to what public leadership should look like, and how leaders make sense of their environment.

On the other hand, by looking inwardly in an attempt to contextualise the situation, and as a means of understanding what is occurring within public sector practice, Kearney (2008), observes that a fundamental problem in endeavouring to espouse leadership within a public sector context, is the inherent nature of multifaceted frameworks, and symbiotic network arrangements, in which public sector organisations function. In essence, this translates to a

complex network, with an on-going interplay between agents within a system, moreover, it could be deduced that Kearney (2008) is attempting to demonstrate the many intricate layers that make up the civil service. The context in which public service organisations function is evolving at a rapid pace (O’Rafferty, et al., 2008), and with change comes many challenges. In support of this argument, Liddle (2010) asserts that public sector leaders work within the confines of a system that is ill-defined, unclear, networked, and has role ambiguity, in addition to collaborative spheres with vague boundaries.

Arguably, as a means of enacting organisational outcomes and achieving strategic goals, leadership practices varied within the public sector, for example, the traditional hierarchical, command and control administrative leadership models (Chapman and O’Toole, 2010); distributed leadership perspective (Spillane, Halverson and Diamond, 2007); adaptive leadership (Thygeson, Morrissey and Ulstad, 2010); leader-follower relationship (Oberfield, 2012); charismatic leadership (Javidan and Waldman, 2003); and transformational and transactional leadership (Van Wart, 2013a; Oberfield, 2012). Osbourn, Hunt, and Jauch (2002) emphasised that the importance of leadership effectiveness, in relation to contextual factors, allows conclusions to be drawn as it relates to determining what style of leadership is applicable to the public sector at this time, and what will constitute leadership effectiveness from that worldview.

Debatably, the literature revealed that transformational and transactional leadership models, may not be suitable for public sector entities, given the complexities, and changes to both the internal and external environment. Likewise, Oberfield (2012) purports that with the leader-follower model, followers’ perceptions, experiences and resulting actions may lead to a point of inertia over time. Correspondingly, observations by Burns (2001) show that leaders may now need to have a keen awareness of the chaotic environment in which they function and to become more adaptive to their circumstances over time. Conclusions drawn here could have implications for the public sector, for example, the prevailing leadership models explored above are no longer effective, within a more modernised civil service context. Leaders may need to draw on a plethora of skills, allowing them to be system thinkers, relational, dynamic

and spanning jurisdictional boundaries (Liddle, 2010). A review of the literature implies that a new model of leadership is required, one that has adaptive functions, allows leaders to be more strategic and work collaboratively at all levels of government.

Thus, in an attempt to show value, not only from a scholarship point of view but from a practitioners perspectives Raelin's (2011; Raelin, 2005) idea of interweaving leadership within a practice, would aptly fit. Parallels could be drawn by introducing the concept of how leaders could begin to think more complex in efforts to open critical dialogue, while at the same time being more leaderful. Perhaps, a cross-fertilisation of concepts could be married together to help with reframing or sense-making of what leadership may mean within a public sector context.

2.8 Relational Leadership

This section will provide a brief account of relational leadership theory, which is a relatively new field of research. It is a useful overarching process theory, which draws from both the entity and relational ontological stands of relational leadership, encompassing various methodologies to fully explore and comprehend the relational dynamics of leadership and how it is organised (Uhl-Bien, 2006). Drawing on relational leadership theory may help to give the insight to address the research problem by considering how leadership relations are created, and how those relational dynamics add to structuring (Uhl-Bien, 2006).

Under the umbrella of the relational perspectives, there are two standpoints: the entity and the relational. The entity perspective is centred within the realist ontology (Uhl-Bien, 2006). Leadership is individualistic, and people get in alignment with each other to accomplish common goals (Uhl-Bien, 2006). In other words, there are two main epistemological threads: the first is the 'knowing' individual which is described as akin to an entity, falling under the Cartesian philosophy (Hosking, Dachler, and Gergen, 1995). The second is related to the first in that the individual has a knowing mind and their ontology is separated from the external and internal experiences of nature (Hosking, Dachler, and Gergen, 1995). Correspondingly, the entity perspective emphasises factors such as traits, actions, and behaviours of individuals, and

they interact with others to forge interpersonal relationships. The implication then is that although the entity perspective has moved within the relational sphere, the focus is still on the leader as the manager or object-subject. However, with the entity perspective the observable pragmatic differentiation is the manner in how they enact process, for example, although the entity perspective references process, it is superficially examined (Uhl-Bien, 2006). The author highlighted weaknesses in this approach by citing that it only captures glimpses into the realities of the relational accounts of participants, in short, entity methodologies did not appear to be probing deep enough to uncover how process interactions were occurring within the practice (Uhl-Bien, 2006).

On the other hand, the relational perspective takes a stance that leadership is a social process, in that it is socially constructed, and it mainly concentrates on process within the local, cultural and historical context, which may constrain theory building (Uhl-Bien, 2006). This perspective sees leadership as oriented towards behaviours that are based on high trust, and high quality working relationships within the practice, examples of such approaches that fall under this remit are the Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) Theory (Graen and Uhl-Bien, 1995). This is in direct contravention to the second frame of Uhl-Bien's constructionist approach which views leadership as the resultant outcomes of human social constructions surfacing from the rich interconnectedness and inter-subjective dependencies between actors within the organisation, as seen with relational leadership theory.

At the heart of relational leadership, the theory is the study of interpersonal relationships. This looks at the resulting outcomes of interactions between people, and relational dynamics, which is concerned with how those relationships are created within the leadership sphere (Uhl-Bien, 2006; Uhl-Bien and Ospina, 2012; Crevini, 2015).

Assumptions are based on (Hosking, 1988; Hosking and Fineman, 1990) the following:-

- Not limited to hierarchal positions or roles – relational and occurs throughout.
- Interactive dynamics that contribute to emergence (social order and action).

- Relationships occur in context; therefore context is essential for researching relational dynamics (Osborn, Hunt, and Jauch, 2002).

The underlying question that relational leadership theory seeks to address is, “how do people work together to define their relationships in a way that generates leadership influence and structuring?” (Uhl-Bien, 2006, p. 668). This question resonates with the overarching research question posed by this thesis, which aims to explore the, ‘how’, ‘what’, ‘why’ as it relates to the relational dynamics of public sector leadership, in other words looking at relational leadership theory from constructionist ontology.

A review of the literature revealed three empirical studies on relational leadership that were relevant to the research area. This will be briefly analysed with relevant points drawn out to assist with making informed decisions, as it relates to the methodological approaches. Accordingly, Cunliffe and Eriksen’s (2011) study was undertaken at the Transportation Security Authority (TSA), created by the United States Government post 9/11, with overall accountability for the United States transportation security system. The primary focus was on leadership within emerging environments, in particular roles under the newly formed remit; of interest were the Federal Security Director (FSD) posts. Cunliffe and Eriksen (2011), in their findings and analysis, contended that relational leadership is not just a theory or a model for leadership, but it presents an alternative perspective for looking at inter-subjective views. In other words, it challenges how one thinks about leadership from the traditional sense, and ask leaders to consider themselves in relation to others. With this view, relational leadership represents the inherent nature of relationships as an entanglement with others within the world around them.

Moreover, building on the work of Bakhtin (1984), the researchers contributed to relational leadership theory by considering an alternative conceptualisation as a: ‘way of being-in-the-world’ (Cunliffe and Eriksen, 2011), establishing open flows of communication, remaining open, accepting differences, and knowing what may be meaningful to others, generating scenic moments (being responsive to others), and having mutual respect. The researchers had an interest in the mundane, everyday work practice life, in which relational leadership was

embedded; this takes a contrasting turn away from the leader as the individual, and centres on leadership around actors within the organisational system.

In another study, Ospina and Foldy (2010) focused on leadership practices. The researcher's approach to leadership is relational but viewed it from a social constructionist position which emphasises collective action as fundamental to all leadership practices. As the research is interested in exploring the relational experience of leaders, data is drawn from an interpretive framework by using narrative inquiry. They used practice theory to enact leadership from a social constructionist perspective. The research was a national, multi-year, multi-modal, qualitative study of social change, with narrative analysis of transcripts from in-depth interviews from forty institutions in the United States. Leadership practices were studied as of part of a five-year leadership recognition programme.

The research findings identified five leadership practices which generated the environment to bring people together and facilitate collaboration, such as naming and shaping identity, cognitive shifts, interacting in conversations about difference; establishing reasonable governance mechanisms; and interlacing of various worlds through interpersonal relationships. The researchers extended to the relational leadership discourse by contending that these leadership practices were called 'bridging' in that they acted as connectors, and they helped to bridge differences without minimising them. Correspondingly, there were two primary assumptions which formed the basis of the researchers theorising in that they recognised the importance in reducing "power inequities" and acknowledging the value of "difference" (Ospina and Foldy, 2010, p. 301/302).

The researchers noted that for social change organisations, the notion of difference is unproblematic, as they may transcend expectations by simply recognising and being elated about diversity, but rather realising it plays a vital role in their sustained success. Drawing on Ospina and Foldy's (2010) concept of 'difference' may mean that social change organisations may need to consider relational diversity as being all-inclusive in order to accomplish far-reaching goals. Moreover, Ospina and Foldy's (2010) findings in their research resonate with insights from collaborative problem solving, in other words, to transform ways of thinking

about the problem which can be articulated on common ground to enhance problem resolution. This aspect becomes essential within the public management literature, as ownership for a national problem makes a paradigmatic shift in that it is jointly owned by all involved. Despite the value of the research findings, the researchers highlighted limitations in their study, one of which was the sample size, as it was not representative of all social change organisations, and the other was that they were unable to connect practices with resultant outcomes (Ospina and Foldy, 2010).

Helstad and Moller (2013), conducted research on leadership as relational work in an empirical analysis of interactions and collaboration processes as a means of shedding light on leadership within those activities within the practice. The researchers sought to address the overarching question: How is leadership established and applied in the interface between a principal and a group of teachers? What is at stake during their dialogue, and how do they deal with any tensions that may arise during discussions? In efforts to address these questions, the researchers explored relational dynamics of these groups as they interacted.

The research findings demonstrated that trust, authority, and power are interconnected. Moreover, the findings resonated with research on relational leadership in that there is a reciprocal relationship. It is not one-sided, and as power is shown to be used in a trustworthy manner, trust is developed, and the dialogic communications followed by actions are essential. The findings of the study that will align well with public management remit are that the role of power and authority do not dissipate in the sharing of processes, and the principals and teachers remain in their given roles throughout the decision-making process. During the analysis stage, the principal was identified as the formal leader, but the teachers demonstrated leadership within their roles. With this model, relational leadership is demonstrated to be within a network of relationships; however, there is still the prevailing organisational structure and culture. A resonating point in the research is that hierarchy was maintained, and although principals retained the right to intervene in the teachers work, and as such, they are imbued with the power that comes with their authority; however, the study

demonstrated more collaborative ways to attain goals, for example, building trust (Ospina and Foldy, 2010).

2.9 The Role of Discourse

Barge (2012); Barge and Fairhurst, 2008) explored the value of leadership within the systemic constructionist perspective, chiefly, how people use discourse to understand our actions within organisation communications and engage in meaning-making surrounding leadership. When considering how leadership is enacted within the practice, and what it means to be relational, the use of language or how we communicate through everyday dialogue could influence how we interact relationally. Cunliffe and Eriksen's (2011) research raises points on the value of communication, as it relates to relationality, and having open or living dialogue. In essence, talking with colleagues, as opposed to talking to colleagues, this further aligns with points made on mutual respect in the workplace (Cunliffe and Eriksen, 2011).

The ideological perspectives of the use of dialogic practices to engage in relational activities, is congruent with perspectives on discourse and communication, for example, Hosking (2011) suggests that working with dialogue "open up power to rather than close down through power" (p. 60). As such these ideas correspond with Raelin's (2014) concepts of leadership as practice, or what he terms leaderful practice, which is explored in greater detail in the reflections below. Therefore, what can be extracted from the literature on the role of language or discourse in exploring public sector leadership is that conversations open up ways of working or it creates the space to be interactive or relational. In short, it enables complex social responses to move back and forth between people within the work practice, if the surrounding contextual environment is not constrained. This challenges ones thinking to consider how or what creates movement during interaction or dialogue?

2.10 Position Theory

Accordingly, position theory makes reference to how utterances during conversations are developing positions that shape how people respond (act) (Barge, 2012). A metaphor for position theory is akin to a dance, whereby if the dance is replaced by a talk, then it could be

understood as how the leader positions others through the talk, and vice versa. Positions are fluid within the conversation, and they unfold as the dialogue progresses (Barge, 2012; Barge and Fairhurst, 2008). Within discursive practices, leaders could adopt what is called ‘making positions’ as discussed, to keep open, free-flowing, bi-directional dialogue going. Making positions has implications for this research, in particular, how people understand and create meaning through their interactions with each other as they engage in conversations within work practice, and from those conversations, how their notions of what they understand to be leadership shifts.

2.10.1 Making Positions

Making positions encompasses a reflexive interaction between utterances, speech acts, and messages within the conversation. Coordinated Management of Meaning Theory (communication theory), in which Pearce (2008) notes as the conversational triplet is used to explore the meaning of an utterance, which partly decides the next conversational move, and how what occurred in the previous move, will allow the leader to know how to respond. Additionally, as the conversation is bi-directional, the leader’s response will influence how the other party responds (Barge, 2012; Barge and Fairhurst, 2008). This means that leaders need to be acutely aware of their actions at all times.

Utterance (1) → **Leader’s Utterance (2)** ← → Utterance (3)

Diagram 1 - Making Positions – adapted from Barge (2012 in Advancing Relational Leadership Research, Uhl-Bien and Ospina, 2012; Pearce, 2008).

The diagram above explores ‘making positions’, in which the leader commences by remembering that they do not make the first move in the conversation (Barge, 2012). The leader is always the second turn, in this manner individuals within organisational practice wishing to mobilise this model to explore linguistic utterance - Utterance (1), positions the leader to make a response - Utterance (2). The leader can engage in critical reflection on their response, and anticipate the other party’s response, moving the flow of Utterance (3) from

Utterance (2), in addition to engaging in meaning-making on what utterance from the other party may mean (the arrows from Utterance (2) to Utterance (3) (Barge, 2012)).

2.11 Reflections

Theoretical concepts extrapolated from the literature reviewed provided the platform to engage in research within my entity by drawing on relational leadership theory. Predominately, the notion of being leaderful and how conversations could help to sustain relational developments as these were aspects of the theory relevant within my working context. Accordingly, Raelin (2014) signals for a reframing of leadership, as a way of creating an alternative schema that is embedded within the organisational practice, in this regard, the underlying notion is that leadership as practice offers a different epistemology. Thus, engaging in leadership as a practice within my organisation allows for what we know to be connected with reality (Raelin, 2014). In advocating for a change in how leadership is viewed, our language begins to change. As such, Raelin (2014) purports that the philosophical view of leadership imbued in practice have the ability to transcend boundaries and enter into “spaces where theory may be reluctant to go” (p. 4). In this vein, this research is focused on probing deeper into the ‘when’, ‘where’, ‘how’ and ‘why’ of leadership within my agency, as opposed to solely focusing on the individual doing leadership (Raelin, 2014; Raelin 2011; Raelin, 2005).

Moreover, Raelin (2014) is calling for leadership to be reconceptualised, taking on a “collaborative agency” framework (p. 8), whereby, leadership is a collective process engaging the wider community; it is inter-subjective and meanings are co-created. There are parallels in Raelin’s (2014) model for leadership and relational leadership theory, particularly, aspects of de-emphasising the individual perspective and embracing a more collective, or collaborative approach. Similarities also exist in the notion of participation within agents in a system, and leadership in this setting is emergent and critical discourse is encouraged. Raelin (2014) suggests that the concept of critical reflection becomes important as it encourages reflective dialogue, which creates the fundamental platform for greater self-discovery (Raelin, 2005), in addition to understanding others within our sphere of interaction. The underlying concept that has applicability to my agency could be interpreted as if one views leadership, first from an

emancipatory perspective of self-leadership, then once 'self' has been mastered, one can then be free and open to influence leadership within others. This fosters a relational setting and may serve to minimise barriers. Civil servants will then be able to engage in reflective dialogue within a non-judgmental creative space, to exchange varying perspectives on organisational issues with a means to take action or inaction.

I believe Raelin (2005) challenges our thinking about leadership by introducing the idea of a 'leaderful practice', whereby, leadership is seen as being concurrent (leadership operating within a community – more than one leader at any given time); collective (leadership is plural not singular); collaborative (members of the community fully participating); and compassionate. The idea of 'leaderful practice' within a public sector setting, demonstrates how we, as public servants can begin to perceive leadership within a post-bureaucratic era, where there are multiple communities and cross-functional teams. Being 'leadful', Raelin (2011) asserts is a developmental process, calling for leadership within the practice to be epistemologically recognised as a form of knowledge that is dynamic and fluid as opposed to being static or enduring. However, Raelin (2014) cautions that innovative approaches to leadership such as collaborative agency though valuable, may not be fully embraced at present, given that firmly held views on individual personalities may be deeply embedded in our cultural norms.

Drawing on Gershenson and Heylighen (2004), public sector leaders can begin to move away from classical thinking as it relates to leadership, towards a more complexity perspective. By surrendering old mind-sets that are entwined with classical thinking, some assumptions and interpretations of leadership would have to be abandoned, for example, concepts previously understood, or applied within one framework may not be appropriate in the present public sector context. Likewise, switching to and fro between two different interpretations on leadership (the old-classical and new-complexity), one will be incapable of seeing either perspective clearly or simultaneously (Gershenson and Heylighen, 2004). As there is no one size fits all leadership framework, or one best model, by putting on complexity thinking hats, leaders are placed in an enabling environment, where they begin to look at different

representations of the same problem (Gershenson and Heylighen, 2004), from varying perceptions of worldviews, this is akin to becoming more reflexive within practice.

Given the complexity of government makeup, re-conceptualising leadership at the inter-agency level, the underlying premise is that leadership is emergent, boundaries can be crossed, working within environments moving towards a more leaderful framework - in essence, leadership becomes a 'way of being' (Cunliffe and Eriksen, 2011). The urgency to change is reverberated by Chapman and O'Toole (2010, p. 134), echoing points of observations throughout this review, that is, "leadership in the civil service, as previously understood, is irrelevant". Taking meaningful and purposeful action means, "thinking in a new way", in addition to becoming more "responsive and flexible" (Chapman and O'Toole, 2010, p. 134).

Thus, Chapter Three will focus on the methodology. It will take into account the ontological and epistemological perspective that would be the most suitable for researching leadership through the lenses of relational leadership theory, and addressing the questions posed. Additionally, the role of the researcher will be discussed from a scholar-practitioner perspective, not to mention, the idea of reflexivity on the part of the researcher will be explored. For example, reflexivity allows for a form of inquiry not just on questioning what is known about the world, but employing critical questioning about oneself, one's knowledge, and the role played by the researcher in the production of knowledge (Yanow, 2009). The research instruments will be discussed, and it will examine the qualitative framework and PAR approach. The next chapter will present data collection methods, interview protocols, sampling strategies, supplementary data collection categories, ethical considerations and access.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH DESIGN

3.1 Introduction

This chapter will lay out the overall strategy and corresponding dimensions used to explore the research area. It attempts to set out the methodology, and methods of inquiry selected to explore the leadership phenomenon. The Methodology Chapter will first delve into the philosophical positioning, in which the ontological and epistemological perspectives will be specified. Stating these standpoints will help to provide a paradigmatic framework, allowing one to make sense of how public sector leadership is viewed and understood, within a humanist and interpretivist paradigm. The ontological and epistemological positioning will allow readers to understand how the researcher views the world, as engagement with the research problem progresses. Taking this stance will help to gain richer meaning as it surrounds the ‘how’, ‘what’, and ‘why’ of public sector leadership. The concept of reflexivity will be introduced. The research instruments adopted will be discussed in detail, demonstrating data collections methods, protocols of interviews, sampling technique and ethical considerations. Action research cycles will be explored, paying particular attention to PAR as a complementary method to the interpretivist inquiry, which will be used as a guideline for research to be undertaken.

3.2 Philosophical Position: Ontology and Epistemology

Accordingly, the ontology (nature of reality) selected draws on the overall action research principles, which makes several assumptions, that the social world in which we live in is co-constructed, there is a human element (relational aspect), and it is situated (contextually bound), or embedded within this context (Susman and Evered, 1978). Drawing from the qualitative realm, arguably, it could be postulated that each individual has a different point of view, a different reality (Krauss, 2005). In order to understand and make sense of the phenomenon of interest, those realities need to be explored to gain deeper meaning that has been purposefully created. Therefore, the ontological stance taken is grounded within the relativist constructionist perspective, in that the research considers that there is “no objective reality”

(Krauss, 2005, p. 760). However, the possibility of multiple realities, created by individuals who experienced the concern of interest (Krauss, 2005) exists. This perspective supposes that the reality of the situation consists of numerous realities, as opposed to a single solitary view of the world (Krauss, 2005).

On the contrary, Osborn, Hunt, and Jauch (2002) assert that leadership could be viewed as emergent, socially created and deep-seated, within a distinctive work practice context. The inference taken at this juncture is that leadership could be explored and understood as having multiple realities, thus the ontological position taken, aligns well, as the nature of the reality of the situation is generated through dynamic connections and social relationships (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Jackson, 2012). Researcher inquiry within this construct is inherently value-laden (Coghlan and Brannick, 2010). In this instance, the researcher is portrayed as being closely tied and embedded into the research setting, and not viewed as a devoid and objective bystander (Coghlan and Brannick, 2010). In congruence with the above, the epistemology (knowledge generated), works in tandem with the constructionist ontological perspective, in that the assumption taken is that the “knower and the known are co-created” over the course of the research inquiry (Krauss, 2005, p. 761). Accordingly, Uhl-Bien and Ospina (2012) noted that relational leadership theory is underpinned by a constructionist standpoint, which also resounds towards an interpretivist viewpoint that is grounded in postmodernism.

The epistemological stance taken is broadly interpretivist, whereby exploring questions on whether the organisational practice exists may transcend the perceptions of social agents within the system (Bryman and Bell, 2003). Therefore, our understanding must be premised on the experience of those agents, who work within that particular social system (Bryman and Bell, 2003). It is recognised that by operating within the interpretivist perspective, the researcher needs to get very close to the data and become entrenched in the overall process, in an effort to ascertain what knowledge is known through the subjective experiences of the actors involved (Creswell, 2013). It is then essential to conduct research where participants may live and work, as a means of uncovering, through first-hand experience, what participants know (Creswell, 2013). This epistemological stance is antithetical to the position, which maintains

that the primary aim of knowledge is to merely describe a phenomenon that has been experienced, as seen via the lenses of positivism (Krauss, 2005). It rejects the notion that science is viewed as the only avenue to uncover the truth, to understand the world in a mechanistic and deterministic manner, and to function by the laws of cause and effect (Krauss, 2005).

The significance of researching leadership in the aforementioned paradigm is that the potential is there to add value to the exploration of public sector leadership, through qualitative research. Bryman (2004) aptly noted, that there has been an increased interest in research engagement from the notion of gaining an insider view of “organisational symbolism and sense-making” (p. 731). Bryman (2004) goes on to state that employing a qualitative research framework, may allow for the concept of leadership to be problematised, and more fully, or deeply explored. It is recognised, however, that by drawing on the multidimensional nature of action research principles; this research goes beyond qualitative methods. Action research is primarily geared towards solving pertinent issues in a particular context, through the notion of democratic inquiry, where the researcher partners with social actors, to seek and to enact resolutions for messy problems (Greenwood and Levin, 2007). An epistemological assumption of action research is to bring about transformative organisational change (Coghlan and Brannick, 2010), which is purposeful and engages collaboratively with all involved.

Given that this research draws heavily on the underlying theoretical foundations of action research, at closer examination, it could be deduced that all action research frameworks share the same ontological and epistemological foundations. Action research frameworks have a common “theory of being”, or ontological perspective (Popplewell and Hayman, 2012, p. 3), which could be described as subjective. The common epistemological stance of action research approach is interpretive, which is in direct contravention to the positivist framework. In action research, “knowing how”, is more pertinent than “knowing that”, although the aspects of “knowing that”, influences the “knowing how” (Greenwood and Levin, 2007, p. 54). My chosen philosophical position (ontological and epistemological stance) is in alignment with the foundational action research principles as detailed above. As I lean more towards a

subjectivist/interpretivist paradigm, my lens of perception is value-laden, representing a totality of past experiences, beliefs, assumptions, values, cultural and social constructs, in addition to experiential learning within the practice. I am not engaging in research as an objective bystander, but rather as an inside (scholar-practitioner) action researcher.

Proponents of the positivist scientific paradigm may discount sources of knowledge generated in the above manner. However, Herr and Anderson (2005) assert that doing research on one's own practice provides a first-hand account of how one practitioner went about learning their craft and producing valuable learning outcomes in the process. Driven by my passion to bring about meaningful organisational change through an action research framework, knowledge generated from an insider perspective, would be an important knowledge base to share with both academics and practitioners. Herr and Anderson (2005) contend that knowledge produced as discussed above creates a learning platform, or a vital knowledge resource providing insight for the research community, by drawing on actions and beliefs of practitioners that may otherwise not be accessible.

3.3 Research Methodology

The choice of methodology selected is governed by the research paradigm, which provides the theoretical foundations as to the nature of reality, and how knowledge generated around that reality could be explored and understood. The methodology chosen for this research sits within the qualitative framework, as the main goal is to extend understanding of the leadership phenomenon by addressing the research question posed and sub-questions as follows:- *'To what extent could principles of relational leadership theory be applied through action interventions to the public sector in the Cayman Islands to extend understanding of how leadership is constructed and operationalised within practice to ensure that leaders are taking the right approach to meet challenges ahead?'*

- How is leadership constructed, understood and enacted within practice between the various organisational members, and how is that relationship sustained over time?

- What factors influence that relationship, and how can issues be dealt with by using effective dialogue?
- How do leadership activities surface during dynamic interactions between organisational members?

Moreover, the methodology provides the overall strategy, as a means of enacting and assuring a valuable contribution to improving work practice knowledge, through outcomes of action and research, where meaningful change is realised as the outcome. Action research encompasses a multi-method and multidimensional approach, which acts as a complementary methodology with the above-mentioned construct. Therefore, attempting to fit action research into a specific paradigm would be an injustice to this mix-method approach (Greenwood and Levin, 2007). My interpretation of action research is that it offers a complex, robust, democratic process of inquiry, which is the epitome of enacting social change and learning (Greenwood and Levin, 2007). The notion then is not just about the research outcomes, but perhaps going beyond the research.

As means of selecting an appropriate methodology to address the research area, prior methods used to explore leadership from a relational perspective were considered but was rejected. Previous methods drew heavily on empirical studies; Lichtenstein, et al. (2006) opined that leadership could be explored further by probing deeper into the subject area through an interpretivist approach. The assumption taken here is that past methodological approaches were postured from a scientific methodology drawing heavily on a positivist epistemology. The point is made that other methodological strategies may be beneficial, for example, qualitative studies that generate a rich, in-depth understanding of the leadership (Uhl-Bien, Marion, and McKelvey, 2007). Osborn, Hunt, and Jauch (2002) postulated that leadership theory, as it remains now, may be somewhat incomplete. The authors recommended that scholars should perhaps consider exploring leadership through various methodologies and approaches, as a means of supplementing current discourse (Osborn, Hunt and Jauch, 2002). There is justification here to undertake the exploration of public sector leadership from an interpretivist perspective by drawing on action research principles, namely PAR.

Interpretivist research strategies explore how meaning is actively generated and the manner in which meanings are related in business practice (Schultz and Hatch, 1996). The research strategy focuses on the, 'what', 'why' and 'how' questions, and as such, considers the organisation as a single case study (Yin, 2003; Creswell, 2013). This approach fits well within a bounded system (Creswell, 2013). Therefore, the boundaries for the research are narrowed by its contextual location, for example, researching leadership within the regional context in the Cayman Islands. The research boundaries are being further narrowed by first focusing on leadership as a commonality between core public sector agencies, for example, departments within the public sector remit. The common boundary thread is that core agencies are subject to the same leadership principles within the same hierarchical, structural, bureaucratic framework, and they are regulated by the same personnel management legal framework. The justification for selecting the work practice as a single case study is that the research could be considered as a "critical" case, in which research outcomes could potentially extend understanding on how leadership is reconceptualised (Yin, 2003, p. 40).

Accordingly, in order to inform business practice and to ensure the scholar-practitioner link, the overall research strategy is to use the organisation as a single case study within the PAR framework, a subsection of action research. In this regard, PAR could be viewed as a complementary methodology within the overall qualitative approach. However, to understand the tenets of PAR, one should first broadly explore the underlying framework of action research.

3.3.1 Action Research and PAR

The overarching aim of this research is to produce genuine action and good quality research as intended outcomes. In line with Coghlan's (2001, p. 56) perception, an integral part of the research process is inter-level analysis, which translates to moving from the individual, team and organisation level, outwards the community or client base. This concept delves into open systems dynamic relations whereby, a change at one level has the potential to affect change at the other three levels (Coghlan, 2001). Within a localised public sector context, it is envisioned that research outcomes will not merely stop when this doctoral journey ends, but it

will transcend outwards, engendering positive change within the wider community, as public agencies interact with citizens through the delivery of public goods and services. Thus, in order to clearly demonstrate research in action, or what action is going to transpire, this research draws heavily on the overall action research methodology, which offers the responsiveness and flexibility needed to effect meaningful change.

The term action research is historically rooted in the work of Kurt Lewin and his associates (Greenwood and Levin, 2007; Coghlan and Brannick, 2010). It is representative of the conceptual thinking that perpetuates a joining together of “diagnosis” and “intervention” (Schein, 1999, p. 4). This ideology presupposes that there is no separation of thesis between diagnosis and intervention, which is the foundational principle by which Kurt Lewin’s seminal concept, coined the term action research (Schein, 1999; Greenwood and Levin, 2007). Action research could be broadly defined as a type of social research conducted by a group or team consisting of a professional action researcher and stakeholders (organisational members, community or group) seeking to bring about some sort of change for work practice improvement (Greenwood and Levin, 2007; Coghlan and Brannick, 2010; MacDonald, 2012).

In brief, Coghlan and Brannick (2010) characterises action research as having several underlying features: (a) research “in action” and not “about action”; (b) collaborative and democratic partnerships; (c) research and action are simultaneous; and (d) representative of events sequences and methods for problem solving (p. 4). Action research entails the generation of knowledge within an organisation while attempting to bring about change simultaneously (Greenwood and Levin, 2007). Lewin advocated a process that was underpinned by a level of self-conscious, democratic and collaborative strategies for the purpose of generating knowledge and creating action (Greenwood and Levin, 2007). A central thread weaved through the action research concepts is the idea of doing research “with”, as oppose to doing research “for” stakeholder groups, the underlying notion then is that one gains a rich experience through the research process (Greenwood and Levin, 2007; Coghlan and Brannick, 2010).

The main philosophical tenets of action research stem from a class of knowledge generation processes that could be classified as scientific knowledge creation (Greenwood and Levin, 2007). The fundamental argument presented is that the underlying theoretical concepts of action research are a stronger research strategy when compared to other types of traditional social science research (Greenwood and Levin, 2007). Action research can be best understood as a multi-method, multi-disciplinary, multi-dimensional research concept. It could be described as being epistemologically located within the realm, where reality is interrelated, evolutionary, multivariate, and more complex in nature than other theoretical concepts of available methods (Greenwood and Levin, 2007).

When compared to the traditional research approaches that embody the third person, action research differs slightly in that it incorporates three voices, first, second and third person (Coghlan and Brannick, 2010). The justification for drawing on action research is based on the notion that this framework provides flexibility allowing for dynamic responses in the workplace (Raelin and Trehan, 2015) to surface. In researching leadership in this manner, issues within a real-life context could be explored and understood from a practitioner perspective. Inherent concerns in studying leadership in this manner may be attributed to the practical nature of action research which may not be fully understood within the organisation, particularly if senior leaders are more akin to the traditional scientific approach to research.

In action research, the first-person inquiry is representative of inquiry which is carried out on oneself (assumptions, intentions, life philosophy and so forth); the second person entails inquiry into work practice and others; and the third person, involves inquiry of communities (Coghlan and Brannick, 2010). The method for enacting action research is premised on a four-step model which incorporates multiple iterative cycles of constructing, planning, action and evaluation (Coghlan and Brannick, 2010 Greenwood and Levin, 2007). Action research encompasses other sub-sets, for example, participatory action research (PAR), which aims at involvement, or participation by a wider community to bring about transformation change to some situational facet (Coghlan and Brannick, 2010). The PAR framework approach to knowledge and inquiry is from a tripartite view in that knowledge is “for me, for us and for

them” (Reason and Marshall, 1987). In this manner, there are three audiences in which PAR contributes to each of those areas respectively, for example, “for them” speaks to the contribution of knowledge to a wider academic community; “for us”, addresses knowledge that informs our practice; and “for me” engenders the overall research outcomes that is beneficial to the researcher development as a scholar-practitioner (Gibbon, 2002, p. 548).

In efforts to demonstrate a scholar-practitioner link, I decided to use PAR to inform my doctoral research. The justification is that the notion of public sector leadership has wider implications not just for my immediate agency, but one that reverberates throughout the larger public sector community, at varying levels throughout the organisation. Acquiring new knowledge, or perhaps building on current knowledge and understanding in the area of public sector leadership, will assist in bringing about organisational change in how we approach leadership, in addition to how we approach leadership development for overall work practice improvements. PAR has been used to research areas of public sector leadership, for example, in health and education (McDonald, 2012).

The principles of PAR could be characterised as democratic, in other words (participation from a wider community is encouraged, equitable, liberating (giving voices to those that has been marginalised); and it is life-enhancing (MacDonald, 2012). PAR could be described as a process where the research is able to assist in the development of others involved (Gibbon, 2002). The key stages in PAR share commonalities with the reflective iterative spiral cycles in action research such as for planning change, acting and observing and reflecting (Pain, Whiteman, and Milledge, 2011; Khanlou and Peter, 2005). Another area not mentioned above, but equally important is positioning the researcher within the overall context of the research, which will be discussed in detail below.

3.4 Situating the Researcher

The researcher’s position is identified as an “insider” action researcher, which was premised on the fundamental philosophical positions set out earlier in this chapter. Within this context, it is viewed that there is no solitary, knowable external reality and that the researcher

is a vital instrument, who plays a pivotal role in the overall research process (Brannick and Coghlan, 2007). The position of “insider” researcher could be broadly defined, as an individual who is undertaking research within their own organisation and is a fully functioning member of that organisation (Brannick and Coghlan, 2007; Coghlan and Brannick, 2010; Coghlan, 2001). This dual scholar-practitioner role, or the insider action researcher, bears some similarities of Alvesson’s (2003, p. 174) concept of self-ethnography, whereby the researcher is seen as having “natural access” and plays an active role.

The justification for decisions taken on the researcher positionality in the aforementioned was derived after careful consideration as to the nature and role theory plays in the research, and the primary goal of the research (Brannick and Coghlan, 2007). Particularly, as at the heart of the action research concept is the idea of research in action as opposed to research about action (Brannick and Coghlan, 2007). For example, the position taken is that theory informs practice, and practice serves to deepen and provide greater insight to theory. Other contextual factors considered included the mode of inquiry (inquiring from the inside), type of knowledge the research was seeking to generate, the role of reflexivity and critical questioning insight, and experiential understanding.

Attempting to situate the researcher was not an easy task, nor were there any straightforward rules as seen when attempting to undertake research within a more positivist tradition. Arguably, as the research agenda evolves, I may adopt various roles within the action research positionality continuum. In contemplating the researcher positionality within the confines of Reason and Marshall’s (1987) concept that research is for me, working from an insider action research positionality, will serve to deepen reflection on my own business practice, with an aim to generate useful knowledge (Herr and Anderson, 2005).

Given that insider action research has its own dynamics (Coghlan and Brannick, 2010 and Coghlan, 2001); there may be areas which may pose complications, for example, issues surrounding access, pre-understanding, role duality and organisational politics. However, when considering the researcher’s role, what emerges to the fore is the way in which we make assumptions and perhaps how we approach concepts which may be jaundiced by past

experiences and points of interests. Hence, biases and preconceived ideas may become entangled with our research. Creswell (2013) asserted that an important aspect of conducting research is bracketing the researcher's experience, and noting when and how the researcher introduces their experiences into the research process requires careful consideration. This overall concept reverts back to the ideological perspective raised earlier that it is impossible to separate knowledge from the knower (Thorpe and Holt, 2008). The researcher's experience could be embodied by earlier cultural, historical, personal experiences and ethical values to some level (Buchanan and Bryman, 2007). Conversely, Coghlan (2007) refers to this wealth of tacit knowledge as having a pre-understanding which consists of a repertoire of insight, knowledge, and experience. For example, the researcher as a scholar-practitioner would possess the knowledge, or the technical know-how of various organisational areas (Brannick and Coghlan, 2007). A distinct drawback, however, is that the researcher needs to be aware of being too close to the data, which may hinder their ability to be critically reflective, analyse, reframe and interpret data (Coghlan, 2007).

The researcher could be viewed as an instrument in the overall process as they would be intimately involved in the data collection, enacting the PAR cycles, data analysis, interpretation and so forth. Moreover, Coghlan and Brannick (2010) notes that the role of the researcher could be described as that of an insider action researcher, where the notion of role duality comes into play, particularly, as the researcher wears two hats, one of the employee's (or one of us) and the other as the researcher (the outsider). According to Coghlan (2007), role duality may present issues given that pre-existing relations would have been cultivated with colleagues/participants in the research. Additionally, areas of conflict may arise as it relates to position power, given that the researcher is a Director of a public agency. For instance, during the interview process, it is recognised that tensions may exist in that candidates may be reserved and may not want to openly discuss leadership issues. Thus, to effectively mitigate any concerns that may emerge, the researcher intends to minimise any risks by engaging in open, free-flowing, bi-directional and critical dialogue with participants. This would provide the platform for any problem areas to be voiced and equally addressed promptly.

In attempting to situate the researcher within the overall PAR framework, which is premised on the spirit of co-inquiry and collaboration, moving through the iterative and cyclical action research cycles, it is expected that new aspects may surface and the researcher may have to play various roles. In this respect, there may be a convergence of roles at any given stage, for example, while labelled as an insider, the researcher could adopt various roles on the continuum model, such as facilitator, coach, advisor, guide and critical friend, in addition to offering critical expertise (Löfman, Pelkonen, and Pietilä, 2004). The role of the researcher or the reflexive researcher could be viewed as a traveller, moving through various situations to explore issues from different angles or worldviews (Alvesson, Hardy and Harley, 2008). The researcher could be portrayed as a builder, understanding and interpreting the situation and putting various pieces of the puzzle together, which is representative of their views and others for a more rich and diverse picture (Alvesson, Hardy and Harley, 2008).

In extending the role of the researcher a bit further, especially during the collaborative inquiry under PAR, Susman and Evered (1978) drew on the principles presented from the social sciences, namely the hermeneutical circle. Working through the hermeneutical circle, the researcher gains a preliminary and holistic understanding of a social system, in this case, the public service, and this in-depth understanding is used as the foundational platform to interpret parts of the social system (Susman and Evered, 1978). When comparing this concept to the various iterations in the action research cycles, knowledge is ascertained dialectically through a back and forth process of understanding and interpreting when moving from the whole to the parts (Susman and Evered, 1978).

Extending this supposition further, every time an unexpected situation emerges, there is room for reframing or reconceptualisation (Susman and Evered, 1978). This process represents an opposing view to Lewin's view on the intricate reflexive processes that transpires when working through the action research cycles of planning, acting, observing and evaluating (Coghlan and Brannick, 2010). For example, there is no open-ended reconceptualisation; this notion of reframing appears to slow down when a match is achieved between the researcher's perceptions of the social system and view held by the various actors involved (Susman and

Evered, 1978). The rationale for exploring this concept is that according to Susman and Evered (1978), it helps to further strengthen the action researcher's position by acting as an internal signal, enabling the researcher to be aware that their reconceptualisation or views of the situation may not be in sync with other actors. Although I understand the above perspective, from a scholar-practitioner or insider action researcher, there is a possibility that views could be closely matched, given that the researcher would also be part of the overall social system. However, I understand that the point that Susman and Evered (1978) was emphasising in that the action researcher is able to compare and contrast their perceptions with other actors, as the researcher may be able to find resolutions to problems other agents may not perceive. This may occur by actively engaging in reflexivity and being critically reflective of one's practice.

Reflexivity, broadly interpreted by drawing on Brannick and Coghlan's (2007, p. 60) definition, could be conceptualised as an important tool which the researcher employs as a means of exploring and mitigating any potential issues between "the researcher and the object of research". My interpretation of reflexivity within my specific research context is having a keen awareness of my own biases, personal responses, and how I use knowledge within the research environment to guide decisions taken, aid in understanding the situation more fully and to engage in a process of learning and transformation. Etherington (2004) suggests that reflexivity allows the researcher to be mindful of the cultural and social context of the research and the potential implications on the research agenda. I would extend this further to add that reflexivity acts as invisible barriers that allows me to stop, take stock of my actions, and consider multiple voices and perspectives on the research phenomenon. Particularly, as to how I understand and interpret these interactions within a dynamic and evolving context may impact the research.

3.5 Reflexivity

As mentioned in the preceding discourse, incorporating reflexivity in practice and of oneself is essential. Alvesson, Hardy, and Harley (2008, p. 498) provides a different concept of reflexivity and views this not as a fixed or static "thing", but what is understood is that reflexivity engages in a collective construction of meaning. Therefore, to be reflexive, or to

incorporate reflexivity into research has more to do with researchers in their practice of carrying out research, and how this serves to shape what reflexivity represents and means. Reflexivity, an important construct for understanding research (Alvesson, Hardy and Harley, 2008), goes beyond just thinking about what one is doing while researching, towards the notion of generating fresh insight, creativity and establishing reference points. Such points of reference act as guidance so that the researcher can constantly operate in a state of inquiry assessing themselves, their practice and the research process holistically.

Borrowing from Heidegger's conceptualisation of reflexivity, Cunliffe, and Jun (2005) argues that reflexivity encompasses an openness to actively question our thinking, taken for granted assumptions about the business practice, and engaging in a critical examination, firstly of ourselves and our work practice as a way of learning with others. However, one of the challenges of many leaders operating within the scholar-practitioner sphere is finding time to engage in what Schon terms as reflection-in-action, amid everyday organisational pressures (Yanow, 2009; Coghlan and Brannick, 2010). This situation elicits an image that one has to carve out the time and space to reflect on oneself, post action. Conversely, Yanow (2009) advocated that reflection can and perhaps should represent much more. In other words, reflective practice includes the ideology that reflection can take place during the action; this assumes immediacy and proposes active engagement as one experiences push/pull tensions from the human, physical or cultural environment. The overall notion is to have an on the spot adjustment of one's actions, while in action (Coghlan and Brannick, 2010; Yanow, 2009).

Extending our thinking beyond reflexivity, we move towards the concept of critical reflexivity and its value within public administrations or bureaucratic systems. Employing critical reflexivity we can begin to move from the abstract view of public sector leadership and begin to think about leadership in a more complex way. Critical reflexivity offers the lenses to apply critical questioning insights to normalised systems of control, hierarchical structures, processes and so forth, as a means of creating a more transformative practice and engaging in critical dialogue (Cunliffe and Jun 2005) with others to bring about some sort of social change.

In brief, Cunliffe and Jun (2005) demonstrate that operationalising critical reflexivity opens the avenue for public sector leaders to begin to engage in a meaningful critique of ideologies, conventional business practices, and their corresponding implications. When probing deeper as a means of understanding public sector leadership conceptions, critical reflexivity offers the lenses to examine power distance relations in organisations (Cunliffe and Jun 2005). For example, exploring the marginalisation of particular groups or individuals becomes increasingly important during policy development and implementation (Cunliffe and Jun 2005). Thus, reflexive public sector leaders are individuals who question underlying assumptions and taken for granted aspects of the business as usual (Cunliffe and Jun 2005). Reflexive public sector leaders could be viewed as transcending what is considered the norm and moving towards living a life as an inquiry (Coghlan and Brannick, 2010), instilling into one's inner being a greater sense of self-awareness and self-questioning. As individual public sector leaders, living life in this manner, allows agents to know and to understand the limitations of their own knowledge (Cunliffe and Jun 2005), skills and competencies, as they engage with other actors in the systems.

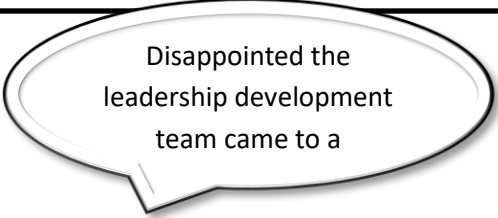
Extending understanding to what it means to be a scholar-practitioner, the notion of being a reflexive researcher surfaces. Reflexivity, on my part as the researcher, may play a pivotal role, especially within the remit of interpretive science (Yanow, 2009). The demands placed on me as the researcher is one of transparency, accountability, and a need to articulate how I have come to know what I know, and what I don't know (Yanow, 2009). As a means of not propagating any research 'sins', I decided to keep a reflexive journal, or log, throughout the research process. This will allow me to document my thoughts in greater detail, in addition to the emergence of any unforeseen events that may surface and how they were mitigated. Coghlan and Brannick (2010) supports the above noting that keeping a journal is a powerful tool to use during research as it enables the researcher to record observations, judge, evaluate and interpret experiences. Similarly, Etherington (2004) notes that journaling allow the researcher to capture the evolution of their thinking and development as they go through the research process, which encourages reflexive research.

As a result, I struggled with the idea of using ‘confessional tales’, which Van Maanen (1988) suggests is a concept found in ethnographic writing. The value of using confessional tales is that it offers an intimate sense in which I can demonstrate self-reflexivity enabling me to deal with biases and bracketing of my research experience. However, I was uncomfortable with the term ‘confessional tale’ because it connotes a sense of owning up to some sort of research infraction which is in direct contravention to its application. Therefore, I decided to use speech bubbles (or a reflection vignette), as shown on page 55, which is an adapted version of the ‘confessional tale’. Speech bubbles will be used judiciously, showing short excerpts from my journal to add value to the text.

In the context of the overall research, there is a need for reflexivity and critical reflexivity to be incorporated into the research, as a means of telling a parallel story of what actually transpired during the research process. Thus, at the core of any action research journey, is the organisational story, which according to Coghlan and Brannick (2010) could be told by using the ‘reflective pause technique’, shown in the box on page 55. This reflective box will be interspersed strategically throughout the research. It will capture my own reflections, insights, show accounts of reactions, actions taken, action planning, and interpretations which run in conjunction with the factual account of the overall research. The reflective pause technique is a practical tool used by the researchers as an authentic approach to the first-person inquiry (Coghlan and Brannick, 2010).

It is understood that a balance needs to be sought between reflexive introspection and objectification (Van Maanen, 1988). In careful consideration of the possible negative drawbacks of the application of confessional tales, such as a criticism of being self-indulgent or narcissistic (Etherington, 2004), the value of its use outweighs the limitations. As a supporting point, Etherington’s (2004, p. 128) concept of “writing ourselves”, and by extension, I would add writing ourselves into the research process, provides a qualitative and evaluative data set, which is a useful tool when working within an interpretive epistemology.

Reflective pause boxes, herein after referred to as reflection box, such as this one, will be interwoven throughout this thesis at key points to show detailed reflections of actual events. Speech bubbles or reflection vignettes will be used to show direct quotes from my journal as a point of self-reflection and critical learning. They will not be used together as illustrated below, but inserted at critical points to support the text. The rationale for incorporation is to demonstrate tensions experienced during the research process and how the researcher dealt with them. It is also a form of sense making (Coghlan and Brannick, 2010).



Disappointed the
leadership development
team came to a

Reflective box 1 – Rationale for reflective pause boxes and speech boxes (adapted from Van Maanen, 1988; Etherington, 2004; Coghlan and Brannick, 2010).

3.6 Methods of Data Collection

This section details the methods used for data generation which was primarily driven by the overall research questions and corresponding objectives, in addition to the ontological and epistemological decisions taken. Research was conducted using theoretical assumptions from relational leadership theory to enrich understanding of the public sector leadership and to understand how it emerges within the workplace. Methods were chosen that would allow the dynamic complex social interactions to emerge, and to maintain the interconnectedness between the various actors within the system. Additionally, in efforts to provide clarity and to supplementary the overall action research methodology, data collection methods employed two phases, the first phase being that of interviews and visual as they were viewed as ways to enrich the action research interventions within practice. The second phase running parallel to the PAR action intervention cycles of the Collaborative Inquiry Team. In line with the qualitative and PAR approach, other information categories include observations and inquiry by the Collaborative Inquiry Team. Secondary data sources include archival documents, company policies, and procedures, deemed relevant to supplementing and verifying background information.

3.6.1 Creating Action Outcomes

PAR, an adaptation of action research, is based on the concept of critical reflections and co-learning, enabling stakeholder participation to be more purposeful, critical, and inclusive (Minkler, 2000). As the reasons for selecting PAR as a vehicle for creating action was briefly discussed earlier in this chapter, this section will look at the PAR framework in greater detail. Specifically, how PAR provides a platform for the creation of action and change within the workplace. PAR would act as a complementary framework to the overall qualitative method applied in this research. Drawing on Pain, Whitman, and Milledge (2011); Coghlan and Brannick, (2010) and Greenwood and Levin (2007), the fundamental tenets of PAR was broadly applied in efforts to address the key research question and to determine how the varying dimensions of leadership would be explored. The preliminary step marked the purpose and context of the research problem and (Coghlan and Brannick, 2010) this embodied the selection of my research area. This came about from an overall strategic engagement exercise as a means of developing a five-year strategic plan for the public sector. In offering further clarity, the above stage could be viewed as the initial problematising phase.

In rethinking how PAR could be used to gain deeper understanding at the operational level, I decided to engage my immediate work team, who, as organisational stakeholders, would act as the Collaborative Inquiry Team. Additionally, the Collaborative Inquiry Team will play a dual role, in that they will also operate as co-researches to engage in activities of inquiring about our organisation. The rationale for selecting this particular team is that a “system” could be viewed as a complex, multidimensional and intricate web of interrelated networks, inclusive of processes and procedures that function in accordance with complex patterns that self-organise as a response to an evolving environment (Foster-Fishman and Watson, 2010). In this regard, my agency could be described as being one element within the complex public sector network of varying entities, and in order to create change, it is important to understand the innermost workings of the system. Therefore, understanding leadership within the context of my immediate team could potentially give insight to understanding how leadership is approached within the wider public sector.

Accordingly, Foster-Fishman and Watson (2010) contended that a key factor in generating change in a complex system is to gain a more comprehensive understanding of how the system is structured, as a means of shifting particular connections that have the ability to leverage greater system change. My agency is not great in size, but strategically placed within the public sector system in that it acts as the governing authority for records and information management across the public sector. Lewin (1952) argued that large system change relied less on size, but rather on strategic placement within the system, and some of the most influential shifts could be small and unrelated to the issue.

Working within the PAR framework it was essential to determine the level and form of participation that the Collaborative Inquiry Team would use as a reference point. It was decided that a more vigorous form of participation would be in the form of a 'partnership' between all stakeholders involved in the Collaborative Inquiry Team and with me as the Director (Greenwood and Levin, 2007). The rationalisation for the above was based on taking a shared approach to the strategic planning process, evaluating and so forth. This would allow for a redistribution of power within in the group, as decision making would be undertaken jointly. The preceding approach to enacting the action learning cycles of constructing, planning action and evaluating action was used to formulate a framework borrowing heavily from PAR model showing the various stages, processes, and structures by Pain, Whiteman and Milledge (2011) and the PAR approach to planning, reflecting and documentation (n.d.). I am cognisant that as the research progresses, conditions may be altered and corresponding actions underscored above may require iterations of revisions.

3.6.2 Interview Interventions

Understanding action research from a position of creating change, interviews play an important role in the initial inquiry as it helps to address the 'what' questions. In this sense, interviews will be used to gather data as a means of enacting first order change by attempting to gain "directory knowledge" (Sackmann, 1992, p. 142). Probing deeply into the various aspects of directory knowledge equates to exploring commonly held assumptions, beliefs, descriptions, and so forth. This would assist in uncovering the "what" areas as it relates to

public sector leadership. For example, the aim of interviews is to gain multiple perspectives to help to understand how the system operates and what people actually do within leadership capacities at various levels. Interviews and visual methods will attempt to gain axiomatic knowledge (Sackmann, 1992), endeavouring to reveal the 'why' questions. This would help to explore underlying causes and patterns being exhibited in the system, according to Sackmann (1992) this manner of probing may encourage second-order change.

As the research is broken down into two phases, the first stage is to gather data through interview interventions and visual methods from the wider public sector, and the second phase is to obtain data from the Collaborative Inquiry Team. Data collection strategies are mapped out to incorporate the use of face to face interviews, using open-ended, semi-structured questions to gather data with rich, thick descriptions. A methodical framework for data gathering was developed in the form of interview guidelines (Appendix 3) using interview principles from Creswell (2013) and Chandler and Reynolds (2013). Interview guidelines covered issues such as keeping an open rapport with participants, discussion points as it relates to confidentiality, anonymity, the right to withdraw, data security and a closing dialogue. Following a script as mentioned above would ensure consistency throughout which would increase the reliability and data trustworthiness of emerging findings. Principles from Myers and Newman (2007) were adopted for the development of an interview protocol as demonstrated on page 59.

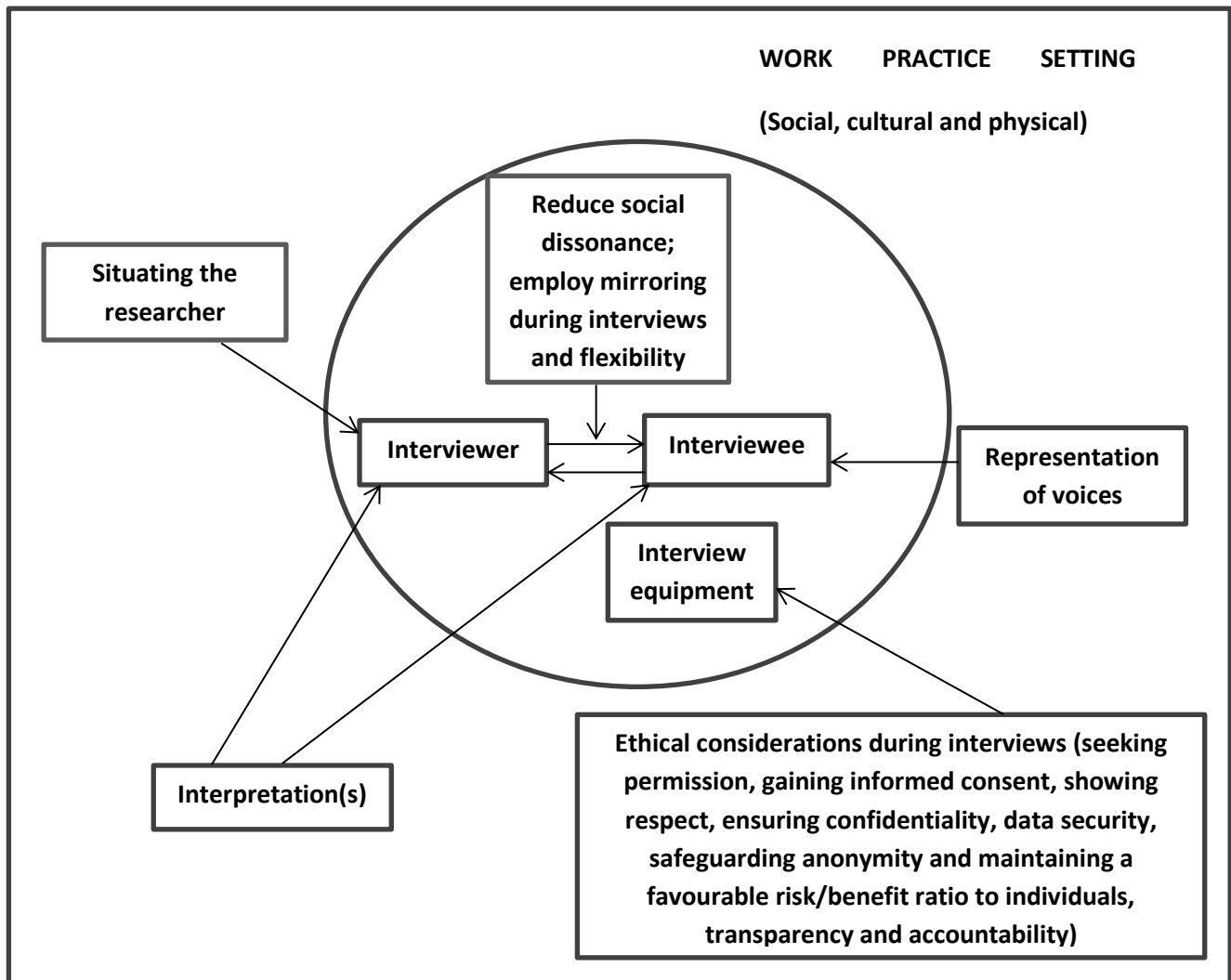


Diagram 2 - Dramaturgical Model for Conducting Qualitative Interviews (adopted from Myers and Newman, 2007, p. 16).

The underlying concepts of the dramaturgical model for interviews was adopted primarily because it provides a framework for addressing any flaws in the model, for instance, the mistreatment of participants (Myers and Newman, 2007) by the strong commitment to adhere to ethical principles as shown above. Employing this model may foster openness, and it will enable the researcher to become immersed and engaged in the process, allowing flexibility. Additionally, it offers a social setting in which any potential concerns emerging could be addressed during the interview process as a means of putting individuals at ease (Myers and Newman, 2007).

It was decided that interviews would be conducted within participants' natural setting and at a time of their choosing, for example, their office environment. The rationale for this decision is that it may help to alleviate any stresses and put individuals at ease. After thoughtful deliberation, it was decided that interviews would be audio recorded digitally, using a Marantz Solid State Recorder PMD 660. The audio files would be transferred from the card reader in the original uncompressed WAV file format and transcribed directly from the audio file stored on the researcher's computer, which is password protected and accessed only by the researcher. It was estimated that interviews would be no more than an hour in length; given an average estimated length of two hours and fifteen minutes to transcribe (length of transcription time is dependent on the length of the interview). In efforts to ensure confidentiality, anonymity and data privacy, names of participants will not be used or any identifiable details. Prior to commencing the interview, participants will be allocated a unique coding number which will be written on the interview form and used to label the audio file, for example, a naming convention would read INFCO-01-12, as shown below:

Data collection code	Gender	Position	Interview number (sequentially)
IN (interview)	M/F (male/female)	CO (Chief Officer) DCO (Deputy Chief Officer) HOD (agency head)	01-15 (first interview from the fifteen participants)
CIT (Collaborative Inquiry Team)	M/F (male/female)	Not applicable	01

Table 1 – Interview Labelling adapted from Chandler and Reynolds (2013).

During the interview, brief notes will be taken by the researcher and a summary (Appendix 4) will be written up post-interview noting any critical observations. This process filters into the overall notion of reflexivity. Transcription will occur shortly after each interview. Each interview will be transcribed using the established protocol that is currently used by my department for the Oral History Programme. The justification for adopting the transcription procedures is that it follows an established protocol by a reputable public sector entity. It also

ensures quality and rigour by adding another layer into the robust framework for data collection. This ensures transparency, replicability, and accountability for all decisions made. The audio recordings would be transcribed in Word format.

Transcriptions would be reflective of the interpretive framework and followed in accordance with my department's Oral History Programme. The aim is to capture as fully as possible respondents' experiences through word for word transcription. The final transcript would be proofread and edited against the original audio file to check for accuracy. Transcripts would undergo a review process as if looking at them with fresh eyes (Etherington, 2004), picking up any areas of hesitation, utterances, pauses, incomplete sentences, verbal expressions (laughter, silence).

Final transcripts would be sent to participants to evaluate and ensure that information given was accurate, and that the full meaning of what was said was correctly captured. Debatably, although this provides a means of cross-member checking to verify data and ensure validity, proponents may argue that having respondents authenticate that their meanings remain intact, could devalue the significance of member checks (Etherington, 2004). Conversely, Etherington (2004) comments that in her experience member checks (feedback) has served to enrich and provide additional layers of information (knowledge), or even new stories. It is recognised that a limitation of using interviews is the time-intensive nature of the whole process, in addition to other potential factors that may detract from the data quality. For example, respondents may not discuss issues candidly; however, every measure has been taken to ensure a robust and systematic process to provide good data quality.

3.6.3 Interventions through Visual Methods

Pictorial representations or the use of images will be employed as an additional means to collect data. The justification for using this method is based on Uhl-Bien's (2006) assertions that incorporating other methods to gather data to explore relational leadership, such as aesthetics, are centred on the generation of knowledge through sensory experiences. For example, how a person's feelings, thoughts or reasoning, as it pertains to a particular sensory experience could inform their perception. Therefore, asking respondents during the interview

to create a pictorial representation of what a leader is within the public sector context may help to access their tacit knowledge. This knowledge then becomes explicit as visual leadership conceptualisations are drawn. Additionally, this may also create the space for respondents to engage in meaning-making or sharing meaning based on their interactions on what leadership means within their given context. Moreover, collecting data through interactions can be used to stimulate reflection and thinking, and contribute to the richness of information gathered (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Jackson, 2012).

Additionally, the use of drawings can facilitate the ability to tap into the emotional lives of respondents, in addition to enabling participants to frame their own experiences without any interference of bias from the researcher (Kearney and Hyle, 2004). Drawing on research by Bryans and Mavin (2006), respondents will be instructed to draw an image and asked to describe their drawing once completed. Having participants verbally describe images, work in tandem with the actual image, as they both serve to explore ideas. In addition, an oral description of the drawing acts as member checks to verify respondents meaning (Stiles, 2004).

3.6.4 Secondary Sources

Secondary data sources include archival documents, and company policies and procedures deemed relevant to supplementing and verifying background information, government reports, and published statistics. Secondary sources will also aid in providing the historical context (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Jackson, 2012).

3.7 Ethics Consideration

Ethics within a PAR framework is not a distinct and definitive process as seen when undertaking traditional research, given that action research is rooted in the values of democracy, freedom, participation, and justice (Coghlan and Brannick, 2010). The above assumes a level of closeness between the researcher and research participants, which will require open, transparent and sound decision making throughout the research process. Halse and Honey (2007, p. 349) contend that although it is recognised that at the core of the research agenda in terms of moral and relational ethics is the “respect for persons”, and the traditional

prescribed ethical principles, though valuable, it may not fit within the action research framework. The interpretation here is that problems may surface given that there is a level of the unknown, as it relates to ethics under the action research remit. Accordingly, Halse and Honey (2007, p. 349) suggest that the issue of ethics within action research could be viewed as an on-going discourse. The interpretation at this juncture is that the aforementioned approach to ethics could benefit from a change in mind-set towards an ethical framework that is fluid, reflexive, deconstructed, and perhaps re-constructed as issues evolve during the course of research.

Prior to engaging in research, an attempt was made to fully address any potential ethical implications that may arise. This was noted on the ethical application form, and submitted to the University of Liverpool's Ethical Board for an independent review. Approval to proceed with the research was subsequently granted. Although every attempt was made to apply a level of strictness, sound judgment and justification for decisions taken, it is worth mentioning here that the issue of ethics under the action research PAR methodology is not a straightforward process. Ethics principles traditionally focused on a distinctive and transparent process governing underlying factors of voluntary participation (the purpose of research, potential risks, and benefits) and use of the data. Within the PAR framework, the emphasis is placed on a collective and collaborative approach to research, which poses challenges, especially in the area of informed consent. The approach to ethics in its traditional sense, positions participants in a "passive mode" as the "subject" (Smith, 2008, p. 18), whereas working within the PAR remit, the researcher and the participants are actively engaged in the research.

In retrospect, the area of informed consent as it sits within the traditional ethics standard appears to be antithetical to the collaborative nature of action research and PAR. Emanuel, et al. (2004) and Khanlou and Peter (2005) make a valid point in that the conventional independent review process may be misaligned with PAR. For example, if one intends to truly work within the spirit of PAR, using the cycles of acting, planning, observing and reflecting (Locke, Alcone, and O'Neil, 2013), then this is in direct contravention to what is typically understood as informed consent. Given that PAR is an emergent process, it is difficult to

explicitly state what specific issues or concerns will be raised as the research may take a different course given its evolutionary nature (Khanlou and Peter, 2005). Ideally, the researcher should seek ethics approval at each reflective cycle. On the other hand, though valid, this approach could prove unduly burdensome and expensive for all involved.

The underlying issue then is what constitutes informed consent, or what does informed consent look like within a PAR methodology. Khanlou and Peter (2005) recommended that informed consent could be viewed as a negotiated process within a collaborative framework, whereby there is a mutual agreement between the researcher and individuals involved. Notwithstanding, it is the responsibility of the research initiator, in this case, the researcher to understand fully and gain informed consent from individuals involved. As a means of being fully committed to doing good quality research and ensuring that the highest ethical standards are upheld, a Participant Information Sheet (Appendix 1) and a Consent Form (Appendix 2) was developed which addressed issues such as confidentiality, anonymity, data privacy, data security, destruction and the right to withdraw at any stage of the research.

As a further mitigating measure, the researcher is committed to maintaining an open dialogue with respondents throughout the research process, ensuring accountability and openness. Additionally, the research has adopted a broad PAR methodology and the concept of reflexivity has been incorporated into the overall process. This was used to demonstrate credibility, transparency, accountability, and validity. The underlying theme being brought to the fore is the clear and resounding notion that the onus is on the researcher to employ, or base decisions on “continuous ethical reflexivity” (Heikkinen, Huttunen, Syrjala and Pesonen, 2012, p. 17). In other words, what is correct in a specific situation, at this exact moment, and for the people involved (Rallis and Rossman, 2010).

3.8 Quality and Rigour

It could be argued that action research warrants quality criteria of its own (Coghlan and Brannick, 2010; Popplewell and Hayman, 2012). The concept of rigour within the action research paradigm references the various phases of how data was generated, explored,

evaluated, questioned, analysed and interpreted through the various action research cycles (Coghlan and Brannick, 2010). Accordingly, Winter's (2002, p. 151) concept of validity and authenticity, as it relates to the action research narrative, could be broadly interpreted from the position of dialectics and reflexivity. Dialectics within this context offers the view that the research is representative of a collaborative process from a "plurality of perspectives". This then presupposes that multiple voices are shown, providing alternative views and perceptions of the research phenomenon, thus offering a level of authenticity for that which is being researched. Reflexivity according to Winter (2002, p. 152) embodies the notion of "self-questioning" in that each voice questions itself relative to the other voices represented in the research process. In seeking to establish criteria whereby validity and rigour is seen in action research, Heikkinen, Huttunen, Syrjala, and Pesonen (2012), suggest five principles to assess the validity of action research as demonstrated below and on page 66.

Validation principles for action research	
Historical continuity	<p>Analysis of historical actions – assessing how action evolved historically.</p> <p>Emplotment – the extent to which the narrative proceeds in a logical and coherent manner.</p>
Reflexivity	<p>Subjective adequacy – exploring the nature of the researcher's relationship with the object of the research.</p> <p>Ontological and epistemological assumptions – researcher's standpoint on knowledge and the nature and reality of the situation.</p> <p>Transparency – clarity and robustness in how the researcher describes methods of inquiry, materials and methods used.</p>
Dialectics	<p>Dialogue – insight developed in collaboration with others.</p> <p>Polyphony – representation of various voices and interpretations in the research.</p> <p>Authenticity – "how authentic and genuine are the protagonists of the narrative?"</p>
Workability	<p>Pragmatic quality – the degree to which the research is successful in</p>

and ethics	<p>generating workable practices.</p> <p>Criticalness – types of discussions elicited or provoked by the research.</p> <p>Ethics – dealing with ethical issues and emerging issues.</p> <p>Empowerment – “does the research make people believe in their own capabilities and possibilities to act and thereby encouraging new practices and actions?”</p>
Evocativeness	<p>Evocativeness – the degree to which the research narrative evokes mental images, memories relative to the phenomenon (research theme) being researched.</p>

Table 2 – Principles of Validity for Action Research (adapted from Heikkinen, Huttenen, Syrjala and Pesonen, 2012, p. 8).

The abovementioned principles offer a good starting point, not just to judge validity and rigour, but it offers a set of guidelines that could be used at every stage of the research process (Heikkien, Huttenen, Syrjala and Pesonen, 2012). The interpretation here is that the principles of validity should not be used for the sole purpose of assessing quality and rigour, as the underlying ideology is to view research as practice, which encompasses “physical, semantic and social dimensions” (Heikkien, Huttenen, Syrjala and Pesonen, 2012, p. 17). This perspective assumes an inter-connectedness of the three dimensions, which implies that parts of the research should not be assessed separately, as the whole research is an embodiment of the sum of its parts. Therefore, consideration should be given to assessing the research in totality, not just on validity and rigour constructs, but perhaps to make a judgment on what constitutes good research. Issues such as research generalisability are often time criticised, however, action research by its very nature seeks to draw on localised or practical knowledge, therefore the issues of “internal generalisability” (Popplewell and Hayman, 2012, p. 13) may be a more appropriate consideration. Popplewell and Hayman (2012) maintain that as long as researchers are able to show internal replication of their findings within the localised setting, then perhaps this may warrant sufficiency for data quality and rigour.

Additionally, other ways of ensuring data quality could be achieved by triangulation through members checks and verification of primary data through secondary sources (Bryman, 2004), in addition to utilising what Bryman (2004) terms methodical triangulation (one by one data collection methods). Coghlan and Brannick (2010, p. 15) opines that achieving quality and rigour in action research could be akin to three prime elements: (a) “good story” (good explanation of what transpired); (b) “rigorous reflection on that story” (thorough explanation, interpretation and analysis of what occurred – sense-making); and (c) “an extrapolation of usable knowledge or theory from the reflection on the story” (this addresses the, ‘how’, ‘what’, ‘why’ and what happens now questions). Correspondingly, Eden and Huxham (1996) developed an exhaustive list of fifteen characteristics of what a good action research project should represent. The basic premise or elements of commonality of each of the fifteen criteria is that of the researcher’s intention to bring about organisational change and that the research aims to develop, or enrich theory that may be useful for business practice improvement (Coghlan and Brannick, 2010; Eden and Huxham, 1996).

3.9 Data Validation and Reliability

There were a number of validation strategies that were employed to ensure that good quality research and reliable data was being produced. In order to reduce researcher bias every effort was made to incorporate a level of self-reflexivity through journaling, interview summary sheets, notes, in addition to maintaining an awareness of behaviours, attitudes, preconceived notions, judgements, or biases that could possibly prevail upon or contaminate the data at any stage (Onwuegbuzie and Leech, 2007; Coghlan and Brannick, 2010; Creswell, 2013 and Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2003), for example, during the interviews, data analysis and interpretations. The quality of data was assessed by triangulating across multiple data sources (Miles, Huberman, and Saldana, 2013); the Collaborative Inquiry Team was used to explore the identical interview questions and visual methods. Other sources included documents, reports, and surveys displaying similar responses verifying the core leadership themes identified, particularly on areas of communication, accountability and decision making. The use of visual

metaphors (drawings) played a key role in contributing to the analysis on understanding leadership.

During the analysis stage, having “rich and thick description[s]”, according to Onwuegbuezie and Leech, is a key method of enhancing the credibility of findings demonstrating that data is “detailed and complete” (2007, p. 244). This is one of the reasons data was transcribed verbatim, and quoted from the original source material as a means of preserving its integrity and authenticity. Furthermore, although the intention was to test the coding process using an independent party prior to adopting it for the interviews, unfortunately, due to time constraints this did not transpire. However, findings were presented to the Collaborative Inquiry Team as a means of member checking, which acted as a mitigating measure. Additionally, post interviews, transcriptions were presented to interviewees for review and signoff for accuracy in transcription. Notwithstanding, questions posed at the executive level, mirrored those at the departmental head level, and this was then taken to the employee level (Collaborative Inquiry Team) within my agency. This created the space for similarities and disparities in responses to be confirmed or dispelled.

3.9.1 Analysis of Interviews

The main objective is to gain an in-depth understanding of the overall organisational narrative. Thus, data analysis was an iterative process occurring concurrently to the data gathering stage. I drew on principles from Miles, Huberman, and Saldana, (2013), Creswell (2013), Bryman and Bell (2003) and Easterby-Smith, Thorpe, and Jackson (2012). The Framework Analysis by Ritchie and Spencer (1994) was considered as an alternative approach because it offered a thematic analysis in a highly structured systematic format. However, it was rejected in favour of a framework that was flexible, and one that would complement the overall PAR approach. In this regard, several modes of analysis were used including content analysis and constant comparative analysis which, was coupled with elements of McCracken’s (1988) Four-Step Method of Inquiry as the overarching approach. Initially, each transcript was reviewed separately to get a sense of what was occurring without drawing any early conclusions (McCracken, 1988). In totality, transcripts were read through at least four times

which gave an overall sense of what transpired (Creswell, 2013 and Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2003). Interview summaries, notes, journal entries and the cultural review were consulted, as preliminary categories or codes were flagged if they shared a commonality or if they were any unusual events or surprises that required follow up.

Copies of transcripts were made, and re-read noting significant words, phrases, and statements which were highlighted, with subsequent notes made in the right-hand margins of transcripts to record emerging concepts. The left-hand margin was used to make notes of re-occurring events noted by interviewees as an 'aide-mémoire'. Given the sheer volume of the data, reflexivity was built into the process as the data was interrogated, and the researcher reflected on questions such as: are there any common threads that exist between the experiences of the respondents? If commonalities exist, what are they and why? Are there plausible explanations or events that may have prompted these experiences? Were there any unknowns or surprising areas emerging from the interviews? Was the information being provided by respondents consistent with the literature on public sector leadership, if not, why not? Are there any other areas of leadership that I needed to explore?

Data were disaggregated by breaking down into codes or categories, which was a first attempt to classify the data in some meaningful way. Codes or categories were derived from exact words (in vivo codes) used by participants or that were used by the researcher to describe the experience (Dey, 1993; Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2003, Creswell, 2013, p. 195). The overall coding or categorisation was adopted using the 'lean coding' process by Creswell (2013), which was conducted by reviewing the transcripts and revising the codes accordingly. The goal was to remain within twenty to thirty categories as a way of ensuring that the data analysis process was manageable.

The data was then 'unitised' (Saunders, Lewis, Thornhill, 2003, p. 381) or broken down further, for example, chunks of the data from transcripts that was representative of significant quotes or units of data were placed into a Microsoft Excel Spread sheet under the relevant category. Microsoft Excel was selected primarily because of its capability of holding large amounts of data and search functionality. As this process was continued, a cross-referencing

system was devised as a means of preserving the integrity and authenticity of the original data content. For example, if chunks of data were moved under the category “communication”, it was annotated with the transcript code, for example, page 14, and lines 15-17. The above process continued until a point of saturation was reached. The analysis included the systematic interaction with the data engaging a constant comparison and contrast (Miles, Huberman, and Saldana, 2013) process looking for broad themes or core concepts to surface. The meaning of these concepts was re-checked by cross-referencing the original transcript and ensuring that meanings were grounded in descriptions provided by respondents. Although time-consuming, this was used to formulate and check the interpretation of meanings, and as a method to reduce misinformation, while at the same time providing an accurate reflection of events that occurred.

3.10 Analysis of Drawings

The mode of analysis used for the images was conducted by drawing on Schyns, Tymon, Kiefer and Kerschreiter (2012) and Ayman-Nolley and Ayman (2005). This consisted of compiling a list of main features or characteristics depicted in the images, and the content analysed from the drawings, in addition to conducting a comparative analysis with the subsequent interpretations provided by the participants of their drawings. The coding system developed for the drawings was based on Ayman-Nolley and Ayman’s (2005) variables used for coding the characteristics represented in drawings in their research of children’s implicit theories of leadership which included: gender, skin colour, violence, facial expression, and presence of followers, follower size, and the size of followers in comparison to the leader. The majority of these codes were adopted, with the exception of skin colour and gender given that drawings were sketched in pencil making the above categories difficult to decipher.

As a point of divergence, Ayman-Nolley and Ayman (2005), in their research used the interpretation of actual people, similar to Schyns, Tymon, Kiefer and Kerschreiter’s (2012). However, the decision was made to incorporate all drawings in the interpretations including images that did not depict people, but showed symbols, words or metaphors, in addition to drawings that contained animals. No attempt was made to interpret the words in the drawings

as some of the wordings used were incomprehensible. Drawings were analysed from respondents from the interviews and the Collaborative Inquiry Team to provide a more holistic picture representing several layers of seniority, for example, Chief Officers, Deputy Chief Officers, Head of Departments, line managers (supervisory) to the employee level.

The first numeric coding was used to distinguish drawings of people from metaphors and symbols. There were some drawings that contained both people and animals, so they were coded and included in both groupings (Code 1 and Code 5). Some drawings contained metaphors depicting leader and followers, so this was coded to include all groups present, for example (Code 1 – metaphor, Code 2 – followers present, Code 3 – size of a follower, same size as the leader, bigger than the leader, smaller than the leader).

In efforts to ensure validity and reliability, an inter-rater reliability was not used as mentioned by Ayman-Nolley and Ayman's (2005) study. However, I enlisted the assistance of two persons not involved in the coding within my immediate department, and who was not involved with the Collaborative Inquiry Team. The justification for this decision was to safeguard against prior familiarity and to ensure that they would not be biased in any way. In this manner they would be termed as "innocent coders" (Schyns, Tymon, Kiefer and Kerschreiter's, 2012, p. 6), as they were asked to verify the coding system derived, until consensus was met as per the following results below:-

Numeric coding	Identified groups	Occurrences	Percentage (of all pictures not sub-groups)
Code 1	People		
	Real representations	1	4%
	Generic representations (stick men)	7	30%
	Metaphorical representations	10	43%
	Symbols (including words)	5	22%
Code 2	Followers		
	Present	15	65%
	Absent	8	35%
Code 3	Size of followers		

	Same size as leader	7	30%
	Bigger than leader	1	4%
	Smaller than leader	7	30%
Code 4	Facial expression		
	Smiling	2	8%
	Angry		
	Neutral	2	8%
Code 5	Animals		
	Yes	2	8%
	No		

Table 3 - Groupings, occurrences, and percentages found in drawings post analysis.

This chapter discussed the ontological and epistemological perspectives, methodology and methods for data collection. The PAR approach was explained, including how it would be used within the organisational context through various iterations of action intervention cycles. The role of the research, and incorporating critical reflexivity was explored, and data analysis discussed. Chapter Four, which directly follows on from this chapter, will provide a full account of the action taken during the data collection stages.

CHAPTER 4: STORY OF CYCLES OF ACTION, REFLECTION AND SENSE-MAKING

4.1 Introduction

This chapter demonstrates how the core action research cycle and the thesis cycle works in tandem. The chapter is presented in chronological order illustrating how the various phases of action research cycles were enacted. The reader is reminded of the wider public sector context as means of providing historical background, which is then further narrowed to the departmental context, with each phase of the action research cycle presented successively including data collection. Interspersed throughout the text are reflective pause boxes to illustrate reflections of actual events, as means of showing how the researcher dealt with tensions that emerged (Coghlan and Brannick, 2010). Action interventions attempted within the practice are shown from preliminary findings, however, the main results and overarching mode of analysis of the research immediately follows this chapter.

4.2 Actionable Knowledge

The underlying premise of this thesis is to create actionable and useful knowledge as a means of bringing about meaningful change to my work practice. The notion is that a domino effect would be generated, whereby a change in one agency can work towards affecting change in another. This has the potential to stimulate sustainable and actionable outcomes, therefore when my formal doctoral journey comes to a natural end with the University of Liverpool; my scholar-practitioner journey will still continue as I engage with management practice. Far too often, research conducted within the practice of management is criticised as being highly theoretical with little applicability of what transpires within the practice. There is an increasing amount of tension between knowledge produced through academic scholarship and knowledge created through practice. This gap or divide could be attributed to a “knowledge transfer” issue (Van de Ven and Johnson, 2006, p. 802). One possible reason for on-going tensions is that knowledge generated within both domains are viewed as being separate, representing

dissimilar epistemological and ontological approaches for addressing research questions (Van de Ven and Johnson, 2006). This view is not premised on the supposition that knowledge created from scholarship stands distinctly apart from knowledge generated from practice, but rather, both sets of knowledge work synergistically as they complement each other (Van de Ven and Johnson, 2006).

Sense-making using the above constructs draws on the assumption that management theory helps to extend understanding of the work of management practice, while practice helps to inform theoretical constructs. Therefore, working within the true spirit of the University of Liverpool's Doctoral Programme, arguably, scholar-practitioners researching within their own management practice provide a form of engaged scholarship (Van de Ven and Johnson, 2006) within their remit, and as a resultant outcome, knowledge produced is both useful and robust. The added value to management practice is that actionable knowledge generated can be categorised as being a "contextualised and useful theory", created by scholar-practitioners, who bring about some sort of change to a system, while contributing to extensive dialogue and thinking about management practice (Anderson and Gold, 2015). It is from this position, whereby scholarship and practice are interwoven, that I engaged with the research problem.

Accordingly, the underlying aim is to produce good quality and rigorous research, to which Coghlan and Brannick (2010, p. 146) recognise that at the heart of action research is the ability to "tell a good story" by synthesising and integrating the entire research experience. As such, narratives by its intrinsic characteristics are favourable for documenting the action research experiences and learning that has taken place (Greenwood and Levin, 2007). Using this approach as the vehicle, the reader is able to get an inside view of the experience close up through in-depth discussions, detailed explanations of what the team encountered, knowledge generated, and failures and successes (Greenwood and Levin, 2007). The readership can then make a judgement on the reliability, validity, and rigour of research outcomes. Notwithstanding, the story will account for what transpired, provide a reflection on the narrative in accordance with the experience (offering an explanation of how sense-making was conducted through engagement with the data); and highlight practical and actionable

knowledge outcomes from the experience (answering the so what questions) (Coghlan and Brannick, 2010; Greenwood and Levin, 2007; Popplewell and Haymen, 2012).

As mentioned, the following sections are set out sequentially to demonstrate how data structures were developed and to show data gathering and modes of analysis. However, prior to delving into the organisational context, this section will begin by providing a visual representation of the overall action research framework used in the phases, which have multiple components throughout. This is laid out in the beginning as a means of providing detail and clarity. The remaining chapter is set out in chronological phases to demonstrate the action research cycles unfolding, which focuses on the practical elements of the research problem.

4.3 Core Action Cycle and Thesis Writing

This section provides a brief overview of the relationship between the core action research project (the actual research element), inclusive of the participatory action research (PAR) cycles that is enacted within my agency, and the academic part (thesis), which incorporates the elements of planning and designing the thesis; the literature review; the methodology; describing the research processing; modes of analysis guided by the literature review; researchers reflections, conclusions; suggestions for further research, and so forth (Zuber-Skerritt and Perry, 2002).

Therefore, as demonstrated by the diagram below, the core action research project and the thesis writing is occurring simultaneously. The rationale for inclusion is to show the overall process and to advocate the potential benefits of action research for management practice and organisational learning (Zuber-Skerritt and Perry, 2002).

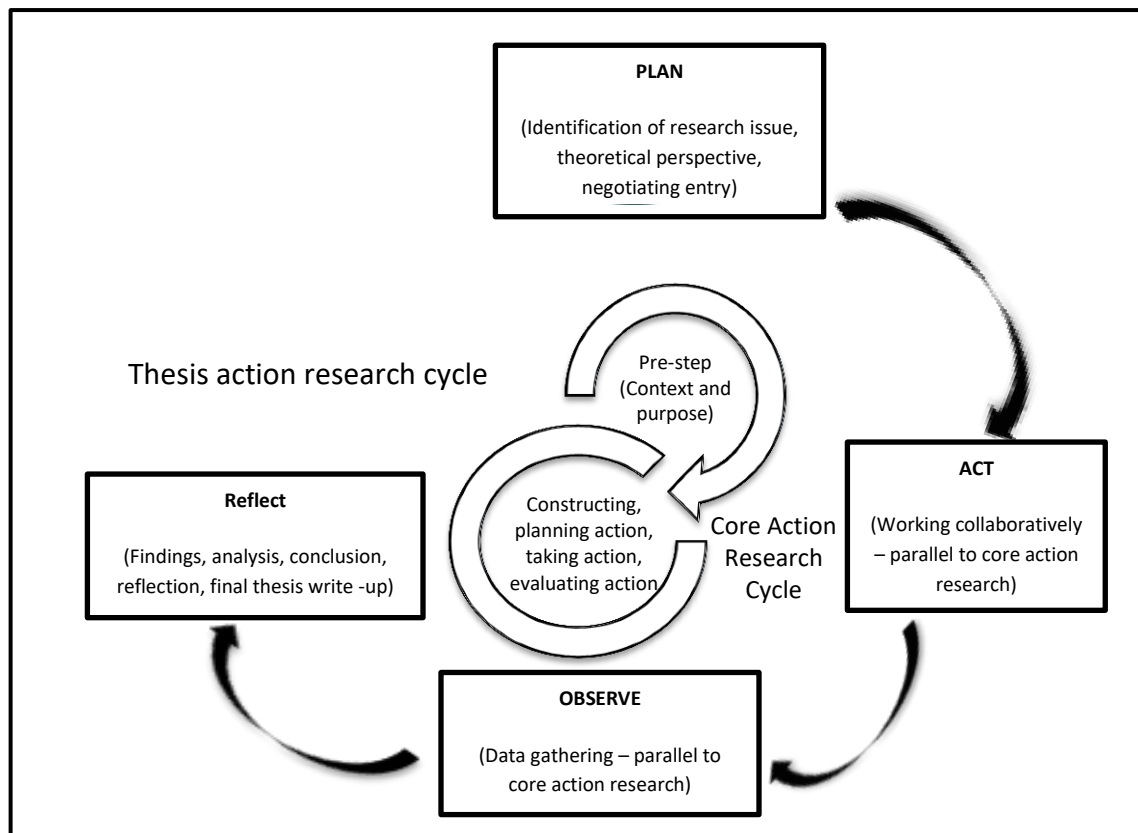


Diagram 3: The core action research project and thesis writing working in tandem (adapted from Zuber-Skerritt and Perry, 2002, Coghlan and Brannick, 2010 and Rose, Spinks and Canhoto, 2014).

4.4 Public Sector Context

As mentioned in the Introduction Chapter, this research predominantly focuses on gaining a deeper insight of public sector leadership within a reform environment, situated within a localised Cayman Islands context. This pragmatic setting provides the scope and boundaries in which the research is being undertaken, especially as the public service is undergoing transformational change, resulting from various reverberations of public sector reform. The underlying notion which acts as a catalyst for such change is the conceptual understanding that government needs to modernise its approach to public sector business. The impetus for some of these changes stems from Phase V of the current reform agenda, whereby issues brought to the forefront focused on diametrically opposing views from the conventional modus operandi of delivering public goods and services. Considerable thought has

been given to service delivery, which includes outsourcing, privatisation, e-government, shared services, public-private partnerships, reducing 'red tape', improved customer service, enhanced leadership, and so forth. Issues are further compounded as a result of inherent complexities of the internal makeup of the organisation.

4.4.1 Departmental Context

My agency, which will be known from here on in as CoreGov, is mandated by Law to provide a regulatory framework for the effective management of government's information assets. CoreGov is not a cultural organisation as such, but there are links to preserving, and making accessible tangible and intangible cultural heritage, and historical information, through supplementary archival and oral history functions. The operational landscape of the agency falls within the remit of core government (entities that make up central government), and it is answerable to a politically neutral Portfolio. As a governing body, CoreGov provides an internal service for central government by ensuring robust systematic records and information management infrastructure is in place for the entire public sector. It could be postulated that CoreGov is strategically placed, as it is representative of one element within a complex web of interrelated network systems. However, as a public agency, CoreGov's relational outreach and interactions are across the entire civil service, given its mandate. In considering what change(s) could be triggered by a small entity, Lewin (1952) contended that large-scale system change depended on less on size, but he argued their value was on strategic placement, citing some of the most persuasive shifts, or changes could be small and unrelated to the issue. Bearing this in mind, the underlying philosophical perspective is to generate change in one entity, which would act as the catalyst to effect change in other entities, through complex interactions within the system. Change in this regard may be small, but sustainable over time.

Thus, applying Lewin's (1952) point to my work practice, arguably, although my department is moderate in size, it is situationally relevant to the context of this investigation. Notwithstanding, CoreGov team members operating within this internal setting possess both tacit and implicit knowledge of the greater system at play (core civil service), and as an untapped and collective knowledge source, they are capable of providing in-depth business and

leadership acuity. Our workforce is made up of qualified professionals, with the highest qualification ranging from doctoral studies to semi-skilled team members. The departmental intercultural setting has always been one of high performance, with a strong commitment to organisational learning and development. Employees are encouraged to keep abreast with current changes within their professional fields and to undertake a certain number of training hours annually, as part of their continuing professional development. The above training is in alignment with performance management, succession planning, and employee career goals.

It is against this backdrop that the work practice problem is deeply embedded and contextually bound. As articulated earlier, given that PAR is the chosen approach for this research, time was spent in Phases one and two mobilising the team and determining the degree of participation prior to engaging in the 'pre-step' (Coghlan and Brannick, 2010) stage. This offered an additional means of providing a full account of the richness of the individual context of the organisation, which is specific to this research.

4.5 Overview: Action Research Cycles

In this overview, an outline is provided of how the core action research cycles were enacted, and how the research group interacted with the various aspects of the PAR framework. The work of the Collaborative Inquiry Team commenced in Phases One and Two, and it will be discussed in greater detail later on in the chapter. Ideally, this is the preparatory phase which sets out the ground rules for the group within the PAR framework. The aforementioned could be viewed as the governing structure which is a form of agreement outlining working protocols, values, principles, roles and responsibilities, and degrees of participation which was found to be a crucial element for moving the research forward. As illustrated in Diagram 4 on page 80, the group drew on Coghlan and Brannick's (2010) five-step model (pre-step, constructing, planning action, taking action, and evaluating action) to enact the action research cycles.

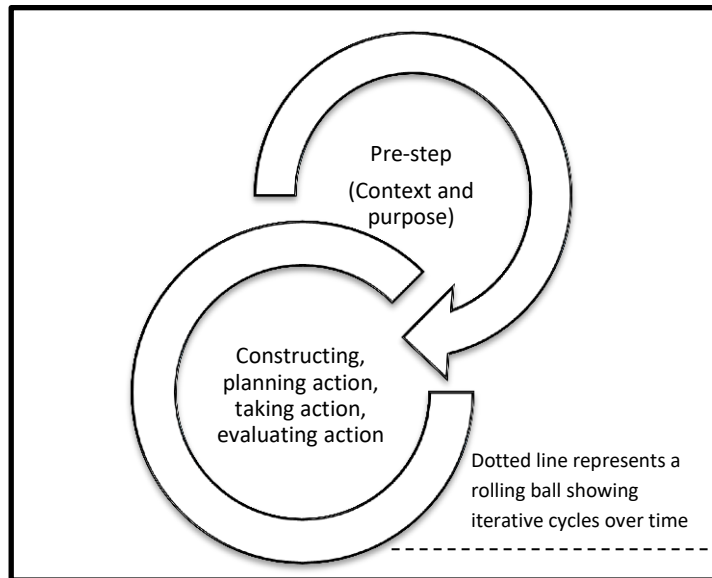


Diagram 4: action research cycle adopted from Coghlan and Brannick (2010).

As a preliminary exercise, the pre-step stage focused mainly on gaining a clearer understanding of the context and purpose. The research group viewed this as what was termed reconnaissance activities. This stage allowed for deeper probing into the immediate environment, gaining a clearer insight into alternative worldviews and interpretations of issues as a means of becoming more informed. This provided an opportunity for problematising, in addition to opening up the creative space to engage in the critical questioning insight of what would be considered the norm. For example, in my organisation, we are dealing with some inherent leadership behaviours that could be described as the ‘way things are done around here’. Therefore by engaging in what is considered ‘jig sawing’ (or putting the pieces of the puzzle together), the group engaged in critical questioning activities by contemplating why this research was necessary, what were the benefits of undertaking the research from a multilateral perspective (individual, department, wider organisation), what were the triggers for change, and assessment of the current and desired future state. A fundamental area of the pre-step stage was relationship building, however, in this specific research case, the group already had pre-existing working relationships. Therefore, working within the PAR framework allowed the group to forge a different kind of bond through subtle social interactions via the research setting.

Having re-established relationships, in addition to gathering a solid grounding of the context and purpose of the work practice problem, the group engaged in the 'constructing stage'. This consisted of brainstorming sessions as a means of developing ideas or 'theories' about what occurred within the practice. For example, brainstorming sessions included talking over issues, sharing various insights and drawing from past experiences as a means of co-constructing meaning. This allowed the group to compare and contrast personal accounts, to understand how people ascribed meaning to what transpired within the practice, and to determine a shared understanding of the present state. The above exercise helped the group to draw on past work practice information to identify leadership areas that required improvement. Additionally, these sessions were useful in that they helped to gain insight into practice, in addition to aiding understanding as to what level of change would be required to reach the preferred future state. A resultant outcome which helped to feed into the other cycles was that an understanding of leadership within practice was being developed cumulatively. As such, other data structures were developed in conjunction with the above, as this would serve as a means of building rigour, and internal validity into the research. Moreover, data would be gathered through interview interventions from the wider public service by inviting participants to volunteer to participate in the research, and respondents would be selected based on the criteria mentioned in Chapter Three (Methodology and Research Design).

Having gathered data through interview interventions and visual methods, the Collaborative Inquiry Team would explore the same interview questions and visual methods that were asked of interviewees. This allowed a comparison of results from both the employer's and employees' perspective. An analysis of the data would be undertaken which would allow for themes to emerge, explored and tested within the practice. Following the aforementioned, planning action would enable a plan to be created, and tested through action intervention cycles within the department (taking action).

4.6 Phase 1: Mobilising the Collaborative Inquiry Team

A central tenet of action research is that people matter, and their participation matter. Therefore in efforts to bring out planned change within my own entity, the method of inquiry selected for this research, as discussed in Chapter Three, was PAR. Operating within the constructs of the PAR approach presented an opportunity for those affected by the organisational issue to be involved. For example, within my department, we are dealing with residual outcomes of cynicism and low morale as a result of deep-seated leadership issues (Seymour 2007). Within the PAR framework, as a group, my team and I would be able to work collaboratively to draw on each other's experiences to view the situation from multiple perspectives, enabling a more comprehensive understanding of the problem to be gained. Moreover, PAR is about improving the work practice environment through some form of social change. As echoed by Kemmis and McTaggart, ideally the most effective PAR framework could be described as, "a social process of collaborative learning realised by groups of people who join together in changing practices through which they interact in a shared social world" (2006, p. 277). Notwithstanding, an important point of reflection was raised by Burns, Harvey, and Aragon (2012), who underscored that as researchers, or facilitators, there is a need to have an acute awareness of power within systems as engagement with problem-solving commences. Likewise, researchers should be mindful of their own positionality within the problem engagement sphere, as the power the researcher holds could potentially influence what transpires within the "shared social space" (Burns, Harvey, Aragon, 2012, p. 3).

Consideration was given for the researcher positionality articulated in Chapter Three, as it relates to my own social positioning within this "shared social space" (Burns, Harvey, Aragon, 2012, p.3). When looking at my role differently, I recognised that as a Director of a department, I fall within the middle sphere of the organisation. I do not fall within the c-suite, or upper hierarchical level, or within the employee level; I am in between. This middle range position, however, comes with its own stigma, as the general organisational perception of Heads of Departments within the hierarchy is that of a 'technocrat', as evidenced by practice through the organisational narrative. Once placed in this technical bracket, it is very difficult to transcend

upward; however, I have made a concerted effort over my personal development journey to move away from that bracket, if only to shed light on an alternative view of leadership. It is from this experience that I would classify myself as falling within the “other” category, which still impacts my organisational life and fuel on-going frustrations I face. This positioning within practice could be further described as being both dominant, as a Director within my immediate team sphere, and marginalised within the overall organisational hierarchy. That said I have a unique platform to explore the organisational issue of leadership, as there is an innate pre-understanding of both sides of the coin – the employer and the employee.

Having identified the research topic, and gaining the organisation’s blessing, in addition to receiving approval from the University of Liverpool’s Ethics Committee, I was ready to move forward with the research agenda. Therefore in the spirit of PAR, I engaged colleagues within my own department, recognising that as a Director there may be some initial level of resistance and uncertainty. Particularly, as I already had a pre-existing relationship with colleagues, and I would be engaging with team members who would be considered as lower ranked civil servants. The initial challenge resided within the area of role duality as a Director (complete organisational member) and as a researcher (academic). However, given that I had undertaken previous research within the department, colleagues were familiar with the notion of role duality. The only caveat is that role duality has a different meaning within the action research paradigm in that the researcher or insider action researcher is deeply embedded in the process, which can lead to role conflict (Coghlan and Brannick 2010), where there is a push-pull tension experienced between both roles.

As the work practice outcome of the research is to explore, understand and improve our overall leadership experience within the public service, eventually a group was formed, with representatives of colleagues from three different units within my agency. The team consisted of members who displayed in-depth knowledge, skills, and experience pertinent to the research area. Additionally, one member who was only with the agency for three months was included, as this would allow for fresh insight to be gained. I am mindful that members selected for the Collaborative Inquiry Team were based on my own personal assumptions, values and prior

knowledge of the agency. However, by incorporating reflexivity into the overall process, the justification for their inclusion was based on the value of their pertinent knowledge and the experience team members possessed. In all, eight members formed the Collaborative Inquiry Team including myself. The first group meeting was held in May 2016. During this initial meeting, I took on the role as actor-director, where the concept of action research and the principles therein were discussed. Although much of the underlying philosophies of PAR appeared to be a foreign concept, the fundamental notion of problem-solving and working within a collaborative or participatory framework was conversant. Time was spent breaking down action research principles into workable chunks of relevant information that related to work practice.

Enthralled by the notion of providing meaningful contributions to the exploration of civil service leadership, the Collaborative Inquiry Team delved into areas, such as why we were gathered, and how we were going to work. Discussions ensued on factors surrounding the purpose of the research, contributions to work practice insights, and levels of participation. Additionally, an agreement was sought for the application of what was termed, 'Vegas Style Rules'. What this meant was that what was discussed within the group setting, would remain within the immediate group, and it would be treated with the strictest confidentiality, ensuring anonymity as it related to use of information provided through direct quotations. An internal agreement was signed by each member defining our working conditions and commitment to creating a 'safe space' to explore public sector leadership openly, honestly and without judgement. It was decided that we would meet on Mondays and Wednesdays of each week at the office. Drawing on Pain, Whitman, and Milledge (2011), at the first meeting, the team solidified working arrangements and succeeding action interventions to follow. This entailed a working methodology, decision making, action research cycles, conditions for learning and development, acting and inquiring, and interpreting individual and the team's experiences. An agenda was established for each meeting to enable optimum productivity and to guide our collaborative inquiry. Actions taken during this first meeting was to set the framework of how we intended to work.

4.7 Phase 2: Defining Participation

A fundamental area of planning action resided around the area of what level of participation would be considered as authentic and truly collaborative within the PAR construct, especially as the agency is situated within a corporate setting. This rendered much discussion on the degree of participation. In essence, what level of contribution, or involvement in the research would be required by the Collaborative Inquiry Team for participation to be considered genuine? The concept of participation, and how it would be subsequently interpreted within the departmental context was an important issue for us, as a team, because this caused problematic areas which were experienced within the practice to materialise. For example, some of the issues that were regularly faced within practice focused on the central question what constituted participation, or input within the wider organisational setting? Additionally, within our immediate departmental setting, while under the auspices of past leadership regimes, participation within our own agency sphere could be described as ‘quasi-participation’. In other words, by drawing on our shared experiences, we agreed as a team that participation within our own context embodied more of a consultative process, as opposed to a more authentic level of contribution.

Aside from the above complications, consideration was given to constraints within the work practice, for example, time and resources to explore issues, and working within deadline confinements for the production of a final thesis for submission to the University of Liverpool. The work of Bergold and Thomas (2012) was used as a guideline when considering factors such as, who should be involved with the research project, decision making as to which activities co-researchers could or should participate in, and whether decisions are warranted on varying degrees of participation for the different groups. However, to further understand and define the levels of participation, I drew on Arnstein’s (1969) ‘ladder model’ to explore and apply the concepts of participation for my specific context (Bergold and Thomas, 2012 and Greenwood and Levin, 2007) as shown on page 88.

Degree of citizen power	Citizen Control
	Delegated Power
	Partnership
Degree of tokenism	Placation
	Consultation
	Informing
Nonparticipation	Therapy
	Manipulation

Table 4 – Types and Degrees of Participation as adapted from Arnstein’s 1969 ‘ladder model’ (Greenwood and Levin, 2007).

Accordingly, Arnstein’s analysis demonstrated collaborative involvement within various typologies to broadly include many distinct levels of participation as illustrated above. At the lower rung of the ladder, there is nonparticipation alluding to the presence of “expert power” (Greenwood and Levin, 2007). Other categories include “tokenism” to which I interpreted this to be akin to a form of consultation and informing as evidenced by practice, where the inclusion of key stakeholders, particularly with policy development issues resides around formality or regulatory concerns. Within the format of tokenism, participants have access to those in authority as a way of questioning any areas of contention through policy development implications to the wider community. At the top of the ladder is participation through partnerships, and within this realm, power is jointly distributed (Greenwood and Levin, 2007). I

have not explored every area on Arnstein's (1969) ladder framework in detail, as only a few mentioned above was relevant to exploring participation with my PAR research subject.

As articulated earlier, the cornerstone of PAR emphasises the need to ensure that those affected by the issue are involved throughout the process. If the research is not anchored on this foundation within the PAR approach, complete involvement by those affected (the Collaborative Inquiry Team) would be no more than a diluted form of PAR (quasi or mock participation). However, I interpreted and applied participation to practice, and in particular this research setting by drawing on Arnstein's (1969) upper rung of the ladder. For example, the level of participation for this research was broadly understood as falling within the 'degree of citizen power remit'. The justification for this decision is that I perceived my colleagues and me to be analogous to actors working within the public sector, and as actors, we are considered as citizens of the organisation. Therefore, for this research, the level of participation envisioned was more conducive to a 'partnership' within the citizenship construct. This decision was further explored by viewing participation through the lenses of decision making as it related to the research and defined from a point of entry when the Collaborative Inquiry Team was formed within my department.

4.8 Phase 3: Pre-step: Context and Purpose

As mentioned above, the first stage prior to applying the core action research cycles to practice is what was termed as reconnaissance activities. These activities were enacted as a means of fully understanding the work practice problem within the specific context and purpose, or as Coghlan and Brannick (2010) terms, "pre-step", the stage that proceeds the action research cycles. This allowed the application of questioning insight as a means of reviewing the current working environment in order to determine the present state, allowing areas requiring improvement to be identified. This would assist when deciding upon planned changed interventions.

As highlighted in the Introduction Chapter, the commencement of this research was predicated on the notion that there is a problem, or a burning issue deeply embedded within

the organisational context which could be resolved or understood at the very least. Thus, during the thesis proposal stage, the organisational problem was initially framed, and understood as an organisational change issue, given the reform agenda. However, I recognised that I was not being open-minded to the issues at hand when attempting to answer questions such as, 'why is this an organisational issue?', 'what factors are influencing my thinking, and from that position, 'how do I perceive the organisational issue?', and if it is indeed an issue, 'who else thinks this is an issue, and what can be done about it?'. Although in the public service we have been dealing with periods of episodic change through various reform initiatives, I recognised that as a public service, we were very good at crisis management, albeit reactive to an extent, however, change processes were not our forte. Hence, framing the problem to be that of organisational change processes appeared to be too mechanistic with an air of familiarity, and it may not provide room for sustained interest or exploration.

I have come to recognise during the problem identification stage that not all organisational issues are blatantly obvious, and problems that may appear complex at first, when subjected to robust scrutiny, are not as multifaceted as they would first appear. Arguably, not all organisational issues are obvious, and there is an inherent level of complexity involved in identifying organisational problems (Coghlan, 2001). The notion of having a pre-understanding of the organisation, or what one could construe as an organisational issue, was somewhat disadvantageous, given that what occupied my thinking at the time was constrained by involvement in a reform project team. The lenses in which I framed the organisational issue were influenced by that experience. In this instant, I was too close to the data (Coghlan, 2001), and this acted as a barrier, limiting clarity of perception. Therefore, as I choose to step away from being deeply engaged with the reform project team, it was only then that I was able to understand issues from a different angle.

I was cognisant that I needed an area that through exploration, the resultant outcome would be meaningful to the masses. To expound on this point, Coghlan and Brannick (2010) and Coghlan (2001) contends that when selecting organisational areas to research, the key is to find issues that are perceived by members of the organisation as deserving attention.

Additionally, I did not want to tackle an organisational issue from the traditional management perspective, where the manager or leader is tasked with a problem to solve on demand, however, the stark differentiation between management and leadership resides in the analysis of the issue (Grint, 2005). The rationalisation for this distinction could be grounded in the organisational context, for example, management is analogous to; 'déjà vu' (this has happened before, or I have seen this before, and I know what to do). While leadership could be akin to 'vu jade' (this never happened before, I have no idea where I am, and what I should do) (Weick, 1993, p. 633). This concept is borrowed from Weick's (1993) broad or stretched the definition of the cosmology (a subset of philosophy), which asserts that one could adopt a "rational speculation and scientific evidence to understand the universe as a totality of phenomena" (p. 633).

As the impetus for commencing the DBA journey was not only for personal development but to make meaningful improvements to my practice, which was birthed out of on-going hindrances I faced as a manager within my organisation. I was challenged to consider my thinking, chiefly, how I understood and analysed the issues within its local context, and within the context of what is known through the literature on change management. It was at this point that I recognised the issue of undertaking organisational change as a research initiative was not novel (*déjà vu*), and it was only viewed by a remote few as being a concern.

Thus, the above organisational problem was rejected. My thinking about inherent issues within my own work practice was further influenced through continual engagement with the literature on public sector leadership, namely, relational leadership theory, and on-going discussions with colleagues and a review of past research conducted for my Master's Degree. Probing deeper into the organisational context, as informed by the literature on leadership, helped to elucidate the "pre-step: context and purpose" (Coghlan and Brannick, 2010, p. 8). While I had a more informed understanding of the public sector landscape, I could not clearly pinpoint an organisational issue that was sustainable over time, and one that would lend itself to action research. Through various iterations, reflections, on-going dialogue, and brainstorming sessions with colleagues, the research area that emerged pointed to issues with

leadership. The issues surrounding leadership is an area we had never explicitly and out-rightly tackled before so that was a sense of “vu jade” (Weick, 1993 p.633).

Drawing on Coghlan’s and Brannick’s (2010) pre-step stage, the team engaged in reconnaissance activities as a way of understanding and interpreting the work practice problem within the specific context and purpose. In an attempt to describe the organisational atmosphere, a retrospective look at prevailing issues helped to comprehend, and appreciate the context of where we came from, where we are now as an agency, and how we can improve our practice further. Although CoreGov is a high performing organisation, the leadership at the time, as recalled by one of the group members could be best described as a ‘lone ranger team’. In short, the organisation was under a more autocratic, or dictatorial leadership style, which aptly aligned with the traditional command and control public sector setting of old. Moreover, as evidenced by practice, past organisational research on performance management within the entity revealed declines in levels of organisational commitment, and job satisfaction, low levels of employee morale, a breakdown in communication, feelings of distrust, and indifference to the organisation (Seymour, 2007).

Dimensions of the organisational culture and structure, at times, acted as an organisational barrier (Seymour, 2007). For example, the hierarchal structure, chains of commands, inflexible procedures, and lack of communication were viewed as the trigger which kindled underlying issues (Seymour, 2007). These points were raised from both employees’ and employer’s perspective (Seymour, 2007). Additionally, periods of sporadic change within the public service, and localised organisational structural change through promotions and job functions fuelled on-going tensions (Seymour, 2007).

Issues raised above should be read judiciously, as they occurred within the past eight years, at a period when the agency was undergoing transformational change. However, the rationalisation for inclusion is that the department is still dealing with some of the residual and deep-rooted issues. Since then, the department has changed leadership as past Directors left or retired and other colleagues deemed to be the wrong fit for the agency departed. That being said, we are still dealing with entrenched organisational issues which may still be associated

with past leadership experiences. Coupled with the above is the notion of how those ingrained experiences have been perceived and understood within an evolutionary public sector context, especially within my current departmental setting.

As a group working within a bureaucratic framework, during the pre-step discussions, we recognised that we have been socialised to think and conform to particular systems and policies, which in turn impacted our relationships and leadership experiences as they have been influenced by those bounded systems. However, in order to understand the issues surrounding leadership with my department, we have to draw on those past experiences, albeit positive or negative. Then incorporate a level of critical reflexivity into our work practice, whereby we are able to confront our own biases, previously held assumptions, deal with any deep-seated fears, anger or emotions, and be willing to openly confront our thinking, and each other's. As a starting point to authentic inquiry and practical ways of knowing, we each had to commit to being open to the idea of challenging traditional beliefs by engaging in critically questioning of ourselves and our work practice if indeed genuine change is what we were seeking. This allowed us to evaluate the need for change by first understanding our desired state, as this would determine how we wanted to work and what leadership experiences we wanted to have. In short, entertaining the question, what is it about our current state that needs to change for us to transition towards our desired state?

There were several methods combined and used to conduct the analysis, which will be discussed later on in this chapter. However, the mode of analysis used during the reconnaissance activities was drawn from the McCracken's (1988) Four-Step Method of Inquiry in the Long Interview. This process of inquiry sits within the qualitative framework, and it is useful for assessing cultural data, particularly when drawing on 'self' as the instrument of analysis (McCracken, 1988). During the reconnaissance activities, the analysis included evaluating cultural aspects of the research problem and corresponding interrelationships that were not considered during the literature review (McCracken, 1988). Cultural themes that emerged during dialogue included the following:

Emerging cultural themes not identified by literature	Emerging preliminary themes from Collaborative Inquiry Team discussions	Broad working themes	Narrowed to two working themes
Connections specific to change (reform).	Episodic and structural change from promotions/job functions added to continuing tensions.	Change/barriers to relations.	Lack of leadership /lack of communication
Connections to relational development.	On-going issues from past leadership experiences.	Distrust, job satisfaction, low morale, commitment, relational issues.	
Connections to organisational structure.	Culture, structure, and procedures.	Autocratic, hierarchal function, command and control/barriers to leadership.	

Table 5 – Cultural Themes Reviewed using McCracken’s (1988) Four-Step Method of Inquiry.

Through probing deeper into our work practice, we were constructing what the innate issues were, recognising working themes to explore, for example, an issue that regularly surfaced during discussions was lack of communication and lack of leadership. These working themes allowed the group to preliminary plan what actions needed to be taken, which would in effect help to devise an overall action plan. A key element developing from the aforementioned exercise is that we needed to understand leadership from the wider public service context. As such, further probing into the work practice context was undertaken through secondary data available, which was conducted through the interrogation of internal documents, records, reports, archival material, surveys, and past organisational research. The next phase included a

planned action approach to gathering data through qualitative means in efforts to gain a richer contextual understanding of people's experiences, and meanings people attach to those experiences within the overall public sector leadership construct.

4.9 Phase 4: Development of Data Structures

Given that action research incorporates multiple perspectives, interviews were used to generate detailed information from people's perceptions, leadership experiences, and the meanings they attach to those experiences. This will allow participants, through their own narrative to reveal their version of reality of the situation. This version of reality, when superimposed onto the experiences from the Collaborative Inquiry Team through PAR, will shed light, and give deeper insight into civil service leadership constructs. The intention is to develop a holistic understanding of the situation by putting the pieces of the puzzles together, but it is recognised that some areas may be left unanswered. In efforts to form a complete understanding, and to explain civil service leadership relational leadership theory will be used as the lenses to apply to the interpretation and analysis of interviews. This will help to develop a relational leadership theory informed view of public sector leadership.

However, if I were to describe the present organisational narrative of leadership as a metaphorical representation of where we are right now (current state), and how I intend to explore leadership as an insider action researcher, the metaphor would depict the following:-

There is this huge structure, like a glass building, constructed from traditional building materials. The external architectural work is of a customary design. The rigid edifice has weathered many storms, nonetheless, it stands firm. When you look through the glass, the inside is made up of different levels and functions, but there is an air of modernity to the changing nature of the inside – perhaps it is the atmosphere, and not so much the internal design. The structure is called, 'public sector leadership'.

Outside this glass structure, there are other buildings situated, some bigger, some smaller. They share commonalities in their design and function; however, sometimes it is unclear how they are all interrelated. I am situated in one of the smaller buildings. As

an insider action researcher, although I am a complete member of the great structure, I stand outside, and I have keys allowing me access to the varying levels. The clear glass enables me to peer inside, not deeply enough though to understand the different levels and functions or people's experiences.

Like many other members, sometimes I am seconded to the great building to work on other projects. During these visits, I get to interact with different members, and through these interactions, I am able to explore deeper areas of the structure.

Members, through their varying experiences, can explain via their own narrative, visual or metaphorical representation, what happens inside the glass structure, how the varying levels functions and why. However, we can each only describe one part, but by coming together collectively, we get a shared understanding of both the internal and external makeup of the structure.

As a scholar-practitioner, I can decide to either explore the structure by understanding it on my own and describing what happens at an individual level, however, I will be severely limited in my understanding. Alternatively, I can explore the building by drawing on other members' experiences and interactions with leadership. Using the latter approach, meaning can be derived and tested through multiple worldviews and interpretations. It allows for prevailing interpretations to emerge, or for any interpretations that may be shared by smaller groups to surface (Coghlan and Brannick, 2010).

As demonstrated above, a metaphor by description is a figure of speech, which from general understanding makes a comparison or contrast between two objects that are dissimilar; however, they may share commonalities. Metaphors could be viewed as the starting point of inquiry, as they provide a cognitive and perceptual way to express an ideological concept by evoking a form of imagery for the reader. Using metaphors helps to craft a figurative image in the reader's mind of what is happening in a given situation, and it aids understanding. Moreover, at the organisational level, we may use metaphorical language through our daily conversations to provoke thought, which provides another lens by which we can explore a problem (Cleary and Packard, 1992). Metaphors allow us to communicate by

sharing words, expressions, thoughts, and so forth, allowing for a deeper sense of what someone else is experiencing or feeling. Moreover, metaphors can be employed as a useful tool for organisational diagnosis and assessment (Cleary and Packard, 1992). They are fundamental to how we engage in meaning-making and sense giving, they are “central to the way in which humans forge their experience and knowledge of the world in which they live” (Morgan, 1980, p. 610). In this instance, the metaphorical representation used earlier on to describe public sector leadership through my eyes as the researcher, in addition, my agency was selected to provide a conceptual understanding of the present state of affairs prior to engaging in interview interventions.

Stimulated by the aforementioned discourse, and as previously articulated, the use of interviews will play an integral role in the preliminary inquiry as it helps to ascertain “directory knowledge” (Sackmann, 1992, p. 142) through the exploration of the ‘what’ and ‘why’ questions. Within the local Cayman Islands context, interviews form part of the growing oral history collection, and through these conversations, interviewees or narrators (as they are known) are able to retell actual events based on their life experiences. It allows my agency to document and preserve this rich corporate memory which helps to fundamentally shape our cultural identity as a people. We tap into citizens’ personal knowledge of Caymanian history and culture. Capturing historical accounts through the spoken word later becomes oral history archives, comprising a wealth of information and personal insights into the why and how changes occurred over time. This ‘storytelling’ or narrative account offers multiple perspectives enabling the researcher to capture a snapshot of events, probe deeper for meaning, and explore meaning through dialogue. Most people within my organisation are acclimatised to the use of oral history interviews, therefore drawing on this practical ‘know-how’ proved to be an effective tool for data generation. Through interviews, and visual representations, participants are able to reconstruct their view of reality by tapping into their own streams of consciousness, their tacit knowledge, interactions, reflections on past experience, observations, and metaphorical representation and language, which is a representation of a sum total of their individual leadership experiences. When all the experiences are pieced together like a puzzle, the data then begins to tell the story.

Therefore, in efforts to aptly address the overall research question, which is to gain a holistic understanding of public sector leadership, particularly from the dynamic relational perspective and how interactions surface and are sustained over time. I was interested in understanding leadership from the multiplicity of 'who's' that are involved, and how leadership is co-constructed, in other words, answering the, 'what, why, and how' questions. Additionally, having conducted the initial research helped in laying the groundwork, and the next stage of the inquiry was to obtain rich, thick descriptions generated through the use of semi-structured, open-ended, face to face interviews. Although the general approach adopted for data generation is through interviews, the concept of interviews is framed as a point of departure from traditional interviews as merely a data collection tool. In a sense, interviews (asking questions), within the action research construct, works on the underlying premise that interviews are in and of itself a "data generating intervention" (Coghlan and Brannick, 2010, p. 75). Therefore, the application of questioning insight provokes cognitive responses and is used as an internal trigger for self-reflection and reflexivity which is an intervention through inquiry of one's self, the team, interdepartmental relations and at the broader organisation level.

4.9.1 Testing Interventions

In efforts to determine the overall clarity, depth, and breadth of interview questions, and to determine if questions were extracting rich, thick, descriptions, and that the information was useful, 'testing interventions' were conducted. The concept of a 'testing interventions' is being used broadly within the action research agenda, and it could be conceptualised as an action intervention in itself which is unlike the traditional research term known as the 'pilot study'. The justification for using the term 'testing interventions' is to acclimatise the readership to the term, which was used to describe preliminary actions taken as part of the early stages of the on-going PAR research cycles. Thus, 'testing interventions' were conducted using two persons within my agency, who would also serve as members of the Collaborative Inquiry Team. They were representative of an employee and a middle manager as a means of providing varying perspectives. The underlying premise of the 'testing interventions' was to ascertain feedback from individuals on the clarity of the overall comprehensiveness of the

interview questions. Additionally, 'testing interventions' sought to uncover any hidden issues not previously considered to ensure that questions were capturing the right data and to explore the overall comprehensiveness of terminology and phrases. The above process was used to test the appropriateness of interview questions, with resulting outcomes of some questions being revised and others being added. The lessons learned and the corresponding impact on the research was that participants were concerned as to the issues of confidentiality and anonymity, however, after re-iterating the process and taking time to further explain the interview protocol, individuals were at ease. The rationale for conducting the above draws on concepts borrowed from Herr and Anderson (2005) in that conducting 'testing interventions' allows the researcher to explore the research questions, in this case, the interview questions and methodologies to be undertaken. The justification is that the aforementioned was used as preliminary data gathering and analysis as a way of guiding and further developing the research methods. The notion of 'testing interventions' could be viewed as part of the overall PAR process (Herr and Anderson, 2005), for example, the attempt is being made to display what was done, where it has taken me and what lessons were learned thus far (Herr and Anderson, 2005).

Interview questions were influenced by the literature, ontological and epistemological decisions and they were directly related to the overall research aims and objectives. The same questions would be posed to all respondents, regardless of their level of seniority within the organisation, including the Collaborative Inquiry Team who acted as co-researchers.. The rationale for the above was that it would allow for any areas of conflict to emerge, and it would help to obtain a clearer understanding on how leadership is conceptualised at the various levels. The overall objectives of questions were to explore public sector leadership through the lenses of relational leadership theory (complex response processes), to aid in extending understanding of public sector leadership. Questions were guided and developed in accordance with the literature. The aim was to tease out similarities and disparities of leadership expectations from both the employer and the employee perspectives and to gain a more in-depth and comprehensive picture of public service leadership. Drawing on Schein's (1999; Coghlan and Brannick, 2010) typology, interviews were treated as a form of 'pure inquiry', for

example, questions framed as, ‘tell me about your entity’, were used as a means of probing deeper to uncover what was occurring within the agency. Likewise, questions were designed within an exploratory ‘diagnostic inquiry’ structure such as, ‘how do you feel about....?’ used to elicit an emotive response, action or reasoning as contextualised by a particular event or series of events (Schein, 1999; Coghlan and Brannick, 2010). Themes identified in the cultural analysis were used in preparing the questions for interviews that were not considered by the academic literature. They formed the foundation to explore questioning strategies when exploring connections between interrelated areas, for example, change within the organisation and associations or impact on leadership.

Moreover, a final question included a visual representation incorporated as a way to augment, and to develop a powerful visual imagery of leadership, as understood and interpreted from the individuals’ perspective. Interviewees are asked to draw an image, and then explain the interpretation of the image drawn. As explained in Chapter Three, visual methods have been used within the qualitative methodological framework to collect data (Kearney and Hyle, 2004; Schyns, Tymon, Kiefer and Kerschreiter, 2012 and Bryans and Mavin, 2006). The adoption of respondents’ images into the research process as a data collection method incites discussion of issues, which may be deeply held or personal to respondents, but at the same time provides a central value of concerns to the overall research process (Bryans and Mavin 2006).

Further, having such conversations within practice allows meanings people attach to situations or experiences to surface, providing essential clues to the researcher, where themes can be uncovered and tested through planned action (Coghlan and Brannick, 2010). Aspects of the Qualitative Legitimation Model (Onwuegbuzie and Leech, 2007) were used to ensure data validity, in particular, any threats to internal credibility within the qualitative framework, for example, one area, in particular, is researcher bias, therefore I was very careful when wording questions to ensure that they were not leading in any way. Although the above model was used as a guide, not every facet within this framework was found to be relevant given that within the action research construct the primary aim is the betterment of human lives, and to bring about

change within the practice. This in itself requires its own criteria as a means of judging what constitutes 'good' quality research.

4.9.2 Access

Issues relating to primary and secondary access were deliberated, predominantly because I will be operating within the dual role of scholar-practitioner, and conducting research as an inside action researcher. As a mitigating measure, permission to undertake research within the organisation was sought from the Head of the Civil Service and subsequently granted prior to commencing data collection.

While it is recognised that within a wider community outside of the corporate structure, in this instance the public service structure, going native with PAR would ideally involve co-researchers having complete involvement in the research topic, which would include conducting interview interventions and so forth. Although this was the intention from the onset within the organisational setting it was not practically possible as issues arose with primary access very early on, for example, as a Director of a department, I had access to both my own agency and wider hierarchical levels, which included some cross-boundary networks. Members of the Collaborative Inquiry Team, however, only had access in-house (within the agency). In other words, information would be inaccessible within the wider public service community. This point is solidified by Coghlan and Brannick (2010), as the authors contended that the status of the researcher influences the level of access gained. Further, the higher the organisational status of the researcher determines, or governs, open access to wider networks and data. It is for this reason interview interventions were conducted by the researcher.

Journal entry: The initial interview plans did not come to fruition. However, having crossed the interview hurdle, I have come to recognise that my organisation understands research from a traditional scientific perspective, but the concept of action research is somewhat foreign. Maybe I am not articulating myself clearly. I have missed the mark in communicating in opening up dialogue somewhere. In retrospect, I have come to the realisation that although the will is there to work collaboratively, our ingrained values, beliefs, and deeply held assumptions prevents movement. This may also be coupled with the residual command and control hierarchical mind-set in some areas. I wonder how could we remove these barriers and change our thinking. And, if these clandestine barriers are still in existence, how then can collaboration and participation be genuine? I will try to be more attentive and open minded to what is occurring in practice.

Reflective box 2 – Difficulties faced with primary access.

4.9.3 Sampling Strategy and Sample Size

The sampling strategy for this research draws heavily on Creswell's (2013) principles of purposeful sampling, as it was determined that particular individuals would possess in-depth knowledge and diverse experiences applicable to addressing the research question. Participants were identified in this manner based on the condition that individuals selected would be able to "purposefully" (Creswell, 2013, p. 156) provide fresh insight and extend the understanding of the leadership phenomenon being researched. The inclusion criteria and rationale for use considered aspects found on page 100.

Criteria	Justification
Age	Assist in understanding worldviews of different age groups.
Sex	Ensuring both sexes are equally represented, in addition to exploring differences between male and female genders.
Length of time in the leadership role	Inclusion criteria considered three (3) years and above, based on the justification that this time frame would allow an individual with leadership responsibilities to be acclimatised to their business context.
Agency type (Ministry, Portfolio and Department)	This would allow for variance by public sector delivery and leadership roles to be explored and understood, for example, how leadership is enacted in various ministries may vary.
Number of employees managed	Assist in exploring the subtleties of leadership, or differing leadership styles based on the number of employees managed.
Level of involvement in policy development and decision making public sector wide	Justification for selection may help in exploring level of leadership involvement/exposure, as it relates to engagement with policy development and implementation public sector wide.

Table 6 – Inclusion Criteria

The goal was to select a diverse sample comprising of key stakeholders from different groups and to openly recruit individuals who had pertinent experience and roles relevant to exploring the research area. In ensuring a fair and equitable process for participant selection, the issue of “fair participant selection” (Khanlou and Peter, 2005, p. 236) was brought to the forefront. This concern was addressed as there were no exclusion criteria, therefore individuals or groups were not specifically excluded from the research. Involvement in the research was sought through voluntary recruitment by way of an email invitation, in addition to corresponding materials providing in-depth details of the research and benefits, both at an organisational and individual level. These forms included a Consent Form (Appendix 2) and a Participant Information Sheet (Appendix 1). It is anticipated that employing a robust and methodical approach to participant selection would break down, or minimise any barriers to participation, for example, the level of flexibility offered to individuals as it relates to the interview, in addition to explicitly advising participants of their right to withdraw at any stage of

the process. In this instance, the interview would occur at a time and place suitable to individuals, which would provide them with a familiar environment, lessening any instances of discomfort. Individuals volunteering to participate will have the prospect of discussing any areas of concern with the researcher, ask questions and ascertain additional information as needed.

In reviewing the literature on sample size selection for qualitative research, the literature revealed that there is no hard fast formula or one best way to approach sample size selection. The sample size selection is guided by the researcher, so there is an element of subjectivity involved; however, clear justification for sample size selection is made in accordance with the research goals (Fugard and Potts, 2015), allowing for certain parameters within which the researcher can make an informed decision on the number of participants required for the research. When considering the issue of sample size, it was decided that a participant selection of fifteen would be adequate. This is in line with Creswell (2013), who suggests that in qualitative studies, using a smaller sample size would provide the stage to explore relevant themes emerging from the data, in addition to allowing for a “cross data-analysis” to be undertaken (Creswell, 2013, p. 156).

My interpretation and application of this concept are that themes emerging from participants would be used as a form of data triangulation, or checkpoints to verify data and explore any areas of discrepancies. Points being raised here ties in with a broad conceptualisation of data saturation, in the sense that having fifteen interviews may provide exhaustive or appropriate thematic representation of areas of leadership being explored. In short, a decision by the researcher is made in that adequate information has been collected and no further data is required. Given that the research is attempting to collect good quality data that is rich and thick for deepening understanding, selecting key informants representing a small number of well-chosen homogeneous participants can generate pertinent information for data analysis (Cleary, Horsfall and Hayter, 2014). This is in alignment with Guest, Bunce and Johnson’s (2006) propositions that if the primary aim is to understand common experiences and perceptions, then fifteen participants as a sample size would avail.

During the participant selection stage, every effort was made to be fair and equitable during the selection process, there were no exclusion criteria, and respondents were selected based on pertinent knowledge of the research area. Therefore, participants were selected based on length of time in leadership positions, agency type, numbers of employees managed, involvement with policy development and so forth. The sample size was based on purposeful sampling (Creswell 2013) to give a wide range of perspectives from individuals possessing in-depth organisational knowledge and experience within the civil service. The sample size was representative of a broad range of leaders from the highest-ranking officers to middle management positions and supervisory roles. Respondents were selected from diverse agencies, for example, education, health, policing, and so on. Given that the public service is a bureaucratic organisation, agencies may differ in the mandate, but they share a common thread in that they belong to core government, and they are subject to the same personnel management and finance laws, and policies, in addition to other regulatory frameworks. This allowed for different worldviews and conceptual understandings to be captured. Other interviewees as identified by participants, and who met the inclusion criteria, were included later on as the interview process advanced.

4.9.4 Participant Demographics

In accordance with the research objectives, the results of the research are grouped by emerging themes, with the most critical issues highlighted for further discussion. The total response rate was nineteen participants, with only fifteen volunteering to participate in the research study; four participants did not participate for work-related reasons beyond their control. Five participants were between the age of 30-40, while six were 40-50, and four were over 50. The sample population was twelve males and three females. Every attempt was made to ensure that there was an equal ratio between male and female participants. However, a surprising element in the research is that male respondents, when approached, readily responded to my request for an interview, whereas female respondents contacted either did not respond or were hesitant. When exploring the reasons for the disparity, a review of a public human resources report on the public sector revealed that the gender distribution between

male and female is 54% female and 46% male, which implies that it is relatively even (Cayman Islands Government, Annual HR Report 2013/14).

The average length of service is 7.9 years, with all participants being educated to a tertiary level qualification, with two respondents possessing post graduate diploma, and one a certification. There were eight participants at the departmental level and seven at the ministerial level. The number of employees managed ranged from having direct day to day involvement with nine employees at the department level, to having oversight over one thousand employees at the ministerial level. The level of policy development and decision making by participants include global, high policy initiatives that reverberate on many issues across the public service and extend outwards to the community. The involvement of policy development at the department level was only to provide feedback as two participants mentioned within a central or strategic capacity.

4.9.5 Interview Interventions

The interview process commenced during 21 April – 2 May 2016. An email invitation was sent to participants asking them to volunteer to participate in the research. A Participant Information Sheet (see Appendix 1) was sent providing a detailed overview of the entire interview process, including why the research was being conducted, why they (participants) were selected, the length of time for interviews, and how they would be recorded and transcribed. Issues on anonymity and confidentiality were addressed, including what would happen to the information post interviews. A Consent Form (see Appendix 2) was sent with the invitational email, and if interviewees were willing to continue, they were asked to review all the material and sign a consent form prior to the interview. In addition to clearly stating the purpose of the research and outlining in great detail the interview process, each participant was given the opportunity to discuss with the researcher any areas of concern or allowed ample time to seek clarification on any issues.

Journal entry: As an insider action researcher, I was cognisant that I would have to enlist the assistance of some gatekeepers for negotiated access, whether I was a Head of Department or not. I sought assistance from the highest ranked gatekeeper, who endorsed my research. An email was sent out by the gatekeeper to participants, advising that the gatekeeper would be participating in the research, and asked other respondents to consider volunteering as well.

I only received one response.

On a separate occasion, I encountered a senior official who inquired if there was a problem, and why they were in receipt of the email from the gatekeeper. I was a bit surprised because I really did not understand why colleagues were reluctant to respond or even participate.

With the next group of identified participants, I did not use the gatekeeper, but relied on my own relational skills. I sent out an email stating that I was undertaking a degree programme and inquired if they would be interested in volunteering for an interview. I advised upfront that I would be sending out an email which is written in “objective and sterile” language, and I asked that they not be offended. I explained the ethics requirements of the university of which I was bound to uphold. The response rate was higher without the gatekeeper, for example, most people I contacted agreed to participate. I received some automatic responses without resistance, but not everybody that was contacted was welcoming to which I respected.

In efforts to make sense of the situation, during a conversation with a colleague (whom I had asked for an interview), they remarked that people may not have responded because it was a busy time and, emails could have gone in their ‘junk mail’. Could it possibly be that simple?

It was then that I decided to follow up my emails with a telephone call, which facilitated an increased response rate.

In reflection, I think there is a greater need for cultural and sub-cultural awareness, and understanding relational subtleties. I made a judgement based on my pre-understanding of the organisation that the highest ranking gatekeeper would open doors for me, rather it did the opposite. The notion of being relational is becoming evident. I wondered if the invitation from the gatekeeper was viewed as a command, hence the reason why I experienced the early resistance. When approached from the perspective of one employee to another, I had greater success. Going forward I will be more judicious when dealing with power distance relationships and managing organisational politics. I will try to be more relational and open, paying closer attention to preconceived notions and assumptions.

Reflective box 3 – Use of Gatekeepers.

The primary goal of interviews was to reach data saturation on the research topic through participant interpretations of leadership. In essence, when all the questions and gaps

have been explored through the narratives, and there are no new perspectives emerging. In totality, fifteen interviews were conducted, representing a small homogeneous sample of key respondents (Cleary, Horsfall and Hayter, 2014), as the objective was to understand shared experiences and insights, in which the sample size selected was suitable (Guest, Bruce, and Johnson, 2006). Interviews were scheduled at a mutually convenient time for both parties, and they were conducted at the interviewee's place of choosing. This was typically their office space, and the added value of the location is that participants felt comfortable being in their own domain.

Prior to interviews, participants were briefed on the overall process and were advised that they had the right to withdraw at any stage of the interview process without explanation. Time was spent on initial discussions as a means of building a rapport with respondents, and ensuring that any privileged information provided would be treated as such. Interviewees were given the opportunity to clarify any concerns or have any questions addressed. Participants were reassured of data privacy, confidentiality and anonymity. Time was spent advising that the recorded information would be safeguarded, and kept in a secured area, only accessible to the researcher. Additionally, interviewees were reassured that should they, at any time feel uncomfortable with the audio recorder, they were to signal the researcher and the recorder would be turned off. Before commencing the interview, participants were given a unique identifier, for example, IN/M/HOD/02-15. This naming convention was utilised to preserve interviewee confidentiality and anonymity. Interviews were audio recorded digitally using a Marantz Solid State Recorder PMD 660, creating audio files in an uncompressed WAV format. The equipment and process selected were in accordance with the equipment guidelines for my agency's Oral History Programme.

During the first set of interviews, I relied on the interview guideline created (see Appendix 3) to ensure consistency, and to provide a robust framework so that data generated would be of good quality. Interview questions were semi-structured and open-ended, and they were conducted face to face. I drew from the ideologies of the dramaturgical model (Myers and Newman, 2007, p. 16), as detailed in Chapter Three, primarily because it had a strong emphasis

on the adherence to ethical principles during interviews. Using this model fostered openness and it permitted me to engage in active listening; paying close attention to the interviewee while making sure that I was correctly interpreting what was being said. The aim was to engage in dialogue. A concerted effort was made to reduce researcher bias, and to bracket researcher experience at all times during the interview process by being mindful of any particular mannerism, or statements that could possibly influence respondents behaviours during the interview interventions (Onwuegbuzie and Leech, 2007). Interviews were between sixty to ninety minutes, dependent on how much the interviewee had to say. During the interview, I made brief notes as a reminder to follow up on any questions with participants after the interview, or probe deeper into any emerging themes. Within the spirit of PAR, enacting interviews in this manner created room for participants' to explore any leadership aspects that was meaningful to them, and it was not too prescriptive in that any other areas of leadership that I had not considered could emerge. The reflection below accounts for my initial experience with the interviews and what I uncovered:-

Journal entry: The first two interviews took me by surprise. I commenced this leadership journey with the intention of drawing on the principles of relational theory; I had not considered other variables such as empowerment and power distance relationships. I looked at leadership globally as opposed to looking at leadership from the individual, to the team and to the wider organisation. I received greater insight into work practice, for example, one participant described the organisation as akin to "the military or catholic church" (Interviewee 2). I understood that we worked in a bureaucratic organisation, however it appears that the traditional top down, command and control leadership style may be more embedded in some areas than others. My first reaction was disbelief and shock because I had witnessed changes to the way in which we worked; perhaps those changes may have been attributed to my immediate environment, with cross-collaborations within my own circles. I had no idea the hierarchical system was so ingrained. I was grateful for this new perspective and made a conscientious decision to pay close attention to my own assumptions about the larger civil service landscape. I have learned that different departments and sections have their own mind-set and assumptions as it relates to how we function as a civil service.

Reflective box 4 –Initial Reactions and Reflections

That being said, the initial interviews were awkward. Although sessions were extricating authentic and detailed descriptions of events, interviews were not necessarily conversational, as they felt forced and mechanical. The dialogue was not smooth, free-flowing or devoid of

breaks in conversation, rather it erred on the side of a staccato piece. I was uncertain if the presence of the audio recorder and the notion of being recorded created a level of hesitancy to engage in conversation. Moreover, as interviews progressed it became problematic to strictly adhere to the script; therefore guided by the interview questions, I decided to see what would happen if I changed my approach by using a more fluid framework, which would be reflective of a conversational or dialogic interaction. This method appeared to work, additionally, engagement in discussions through questioning probes and prompts triggered other leadership areas to be explored further, as the conversation evolved. I found this approach to be more suitable, and it allowed me to be immersed in the process when I became part of it, as opposed to religiously following a script. In some instances, an observation made was that the presence of the digital audio recorder faded as engagement in meaningful discussions advanced.

Each interview concluded by handing the participant an 8 ½ x 11 piece of blue paper and a pencil, and asking them to draw an image of what they thought a leader was and to explain the image to me. The instructions were purposely kept general in order to give participants room for their own interpretations to surface. The allotted time for the drawing activity was ten minutes, and I remained in my seated position, listening as the participant drew, and interpreted their drawings. Participants' reactions ranged from being readily engaging in the activity to being pleasantly surprised and verbalising that they were not skilled at drawing, but were willing to try, and there was one participant who was reluctant at first since the drawing was completely out of their comfort zone, but willingly participated in the end.

Journal entry: I am feeling confident about the interview process, although I had the one instance when the battery died close to the end of an interview. The decision was made to continue the conversation during the battery change. This was not too disruptive - lesson learned. A benefit of the above is that the disruption created the space to allow for emergent issues to arise. During other interviews, respondents were happy to have the 'between you and me conversations' when the digital audio recorder was turned off. I found these conversations insightful and fruitful as they enriched the overall picture of issues as discussions ensued; however, some information was discarded as it was not relevant to the research topic. Other information I could not use as it was told in confidence, and I treated it as such. The emergent and intervention nature of action research is becoming more evident, and one has to be prepared for the unknown. It is a little intimidating but exciting.

Reflective box 5 – Problems Encountered

As previously stated, in the end, fifteen interviews were conducted, and after each interview, a summary of the conversation was recorded using a template (see Appendix 4). This allowed me to critically reflecting on the process, noting important observations, such as mannerisms, silence, voice inflections, facial expressions, laughter, loss of eye contact, and other non-verbal cues, in addition to any other additional information while it was at the forefront of my mind. The summary sheets were used to keep notes of any emerging themes, or areas that may require deeper probing or further research, particularly during the data analysis phase. Thereafter, interviews were transcribed within one-day post-interview, by the researcher.

Although the transcription process was time-consuming, given that interviews were transcribed verbatim, as a means of capturing the spoken word, being attentive to periods of silence, verbal cues, laughter, and so forth, allowed for an iterative process of listening and reflecting to be conducted. For example, I was able to listen to interviews, audit, proofread and edit before the final draft, enabling separate sessions to interact with and interrogate the data. This resulted in the reading through of transcripts three times. On average, interviews took four hours and fifteen minutes to transcribe, representing between seventeen to twenty-three pages in length. A follow-up time was scheduled with participants, where the final transcript was presented for review and signoff. This ensured that the full meaning of the conversation was captured and, it accurately reflected in great detail exactly what transpired. The member checks were one method used for data triangulation (as a means of confirming the validity of data being captured, in addition to ensuring that the information was a correct and true representation of the interview. In some instances, interview checks provided opportunities for new stories to emerge, as there were others that interviewees recalled once they had stepped away from the process, and reflected. There were the odd moments where some interviewees were surprised at what was discussed, however, they did not change the information, and trusted the process, particularly as there was a strong commitment to the adherence of ethical principles on the researcher's part.

4.9.6 Collaborative Inquiry Team

It is recognised that with the PAR approach the Collaborative Inquiry Team should be meaningfully engaged throughout the entire process from design to delivery, however within the corporate setting, there were varying degrees to which involvement occurs. For example, the initial analysis of interviews was conducted by the researcher primarily because assurances were made to interviewees on confidentiality and anonymity, which were upheld. However, an alternative and established approach, according to Ritchie and Lewis (2003) is to engage the community so that their feedback is sought on the data and findings, and in this way, greater insight and meaning is ascertained. This is one way to foster collaboration, participation, and to ensure a systematic probing of information is conducted. Congruent with the above, it is accepted that in order to improve practice, research methods and data should be accessible to everyone involved in the process. Therefore, to deepen the analysis, the Collaborative Inquiry Team were presented with the findings that emerged from the interview analysis so that meaningful feedback and further review could be ascertained in relation its validity.

Moreover, to gain a holistic perspective, the decision was taken that the Collaborative Inquiry Team would explore the same interview questions posed to respondents. However, this would transpire within an open forum setting, where team members would actively engage in discussions. Meetings were used to explore questions which resulted in an enhanced understanding of the leadership phenomenon from the employee's point of view, and it allowed for disparities to be examined. The team interview intervention sessions were audio recorded digitally in the same format and equipment used for interview interventions. They were later transcribed verbatim by a member of the team who took on the role of a scribe. Data generated through these sessions were conducted through constant comparison with findings from the interviews, which allowed for sense-making and plausible associations between categories to be established and to seek possible explanations as to why they existed. In efforts to contextualise and feed the information or "lessons learned" into planned action interventions, they were listed into two broad categories as illustrated below:-

What things do we do well?	
Inclusivity and acceptance of diversity	Camaraderie
Ability to deal with complex and crisis situations	Exercising authority
Doing more with less	Corporate social responsibility
Joint partnerships (public/private sector)	Training and development
How can we strengthen public sector leadership?	
Decision making	Relational element
Humility	Integrity/Honesty
Leaders should keep their word	Low trust/low morale
Open lines of communication	Fair playing field
Easily accessible to all and not a few	Accountability
Clarity	High levels of trust
Be bold (courage) and willing to change	Leadership blind spots

Table 7 – Taking Action

Equally, another method used as an added dimension to enhance the overall richness and aid understanding of leadership during the analysis phase was the use of visual metaphors (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Jackson, 2012). This corresponded to the last interview question which asked respondents to draw an image of what they thought a leader was and to explain their interpretation of the image drawn. The use of visual metaphors developed a shared understanding and stimulated much discussion. Individuals were able to interpret the meanings of their individual drawings, enabling and empowering members to articulate conceptualisations of what a leader embodied. This, in turn, allowed workable aspects of those concepts to be incorporated into the action plan to be tested within the practice, for example integrating an open door policy into operational facets increases accessibility to managers.

This chapter focused on enacting the various phases of the PAR cycle. The proceeding chapter will discuss the evaluation of outcomes, and the chapter concludes by showing how the results of the data analysis were incorporated into Phases Five, Six and Seven of the PAR cycle.

CHAPTER 5: EVALUATION OF OUTCOMES

5.1 Introduction

This section would typically be heralded as the ‘results’ chapter in the traditional research framework, but it is embedded within the overall PAR framework to demonstrate the outcomes from the modes of analysis conducted. Additionally, outcomes of interview interventions and data analysis will be discussed. In accordance with the research aims and objectives, the findings of the research are grouped together by themes that emerged during the data collection stage, representing significant issues that surfaced during interviews and interactions with the Collaborative Inquiry Team, followed by an overview of the analysis. The remaining sections will focus on the key findings of the research. The chapter concludes with Phases Five, Six and Seven of the PAR cycles, which is a follow-on from Chapter Four, and the justification for inclusion at this point is that findings from the data were incorporated into action interventions for ‘testing’ within the practice. The term testing is used loosely, and not in its empirical sense.

Accordingly, Table 8 on page 112 shows the three main categories, emerging themes, and frequency, post the interview analysis. Issues that are highlighted in bold appear to be the most pertinent concerns of participants.

Categories	Emerging Themes	Frequency
Relationship between HoDs and COs	Relational development (Human resources skills development)	8
	Lack of communication	14
	Clarity in Roles and responsibilities	2
	Not empowering people	11
	Disparity (not a level playing field)	2
	Lack of mutual respect	3
	No autonomy	2
Systemic barriers to relational leadership	Blame culture	11
	Ambiguity	2
	Roles and responsibility	1
	Reform fatigue	13
	Hierarchical system	6
	Bureaucratic/administrative processes	12
	Structural barrier	1
	Cultural barrier	5
	No collaboration	3
Individual - behavioural and attitudinal outcomes	Low morale	1
	Low trust	1
	Leadership diminishing	1
	Potential curtail	1

Table 8 - Categories, emerging themes, and frequencies

5.2 Key Findings – Overview of Leadership Experiences

5.2.1 Theme – Relational Development

Senior public sector leaders at the upper management and middle management levels were asked to reflect on their leadership experiences within the public service, and the data revealed the disparity between how leadership is conceptualised at the upper management level when compared to how it is viewed at the middle management level. At the upper management level, there is a level of perceived generalisation that middle managers

have been categorised as the technical experts, with many of them having been promoted based on technical ability. In this regards, they may not have received leadership training, therefore the perception is that they may be incapable of leading; in addition, many of the middle managers may not identify themselves as leaders. Some respondents voiced their perspective as follows:-

So, one of the issue, when you get to the HoD [Head of Department] level, is that folks are typically promoted because of their technical ability, right, without professional development. Moving them from technical decision making to management, then to leadership, they are ill prepared to lead when they get there (Interviewee 5 – Upper Management).

The people who are the real ...who really impact our outcomes on the front lines are not the Chief Officers; we are typically too far removed from the situation. The people who impact it are the people who are in middle management and they are typically the least, the less likely to identify themselves as leaders. Probably, have not had any training, it could be that they feel that their discretion is usurped, could be they feel leadership is a title you get complete authority with that, and if I don't have complete authority, then I am not a leader (Interviewee 3 – Upper Management).

Conversely, although the middle management level is the essential layer of the public service that makes the greatest impact on the delivery of public good and services, the data revealed that there is a preconceived notion that middle managers are not capable or that they do not have the required training to be leaders or to do leadership. However, the quotes below demonstrate a paradoxical perspective, as middle managers, when asked if they see themselves as a leader, the majority of respondents were firm in their belief that they were indeed leaders, however, there were other reasons in which they felt hampered their ability to lead. The following example demonstrates this view:-

(Pause....silence)...I would say, yes, I definitely would say yes. I would also go on to say a leader does not have to be a person who outranks you, anybody can be a leader. So, I

would say, yes I think I have always been a leader or always shown traits as a leader regardless of whatever rank I hold (Interviewee 1 – Middle Management).

Well yes, I am a leader. I am a leader, but in the system where we are as civil servants it [is] not how you see or how you feel, your leadership qualities will have to diminish because the system where you are working does not allow you to be a leader, but rather to subordinate (Interviewee 2 - Middle Management).

I do, and I think that I have the ability to affect change. I think that I am impeded in my ability to do so in the timeframe I often set for myself because of bureaucracy in varying stages, and from various places because you can get it from internally...so I definitely consider myself a leader, and if I must say a good one...one thing that I would like to say is that I think that there is a greater percentage of people in leadership roles that are not leaders, than people who are really leaders (Interview 8 – Middle Management).

5.2.2 Theme – Communication

The data revealed that there appears to be a relational disconnect between middle and upper management levels, which has contributed to heightened levels of frustration. In particular, the lack of communication or genuine discourse was cited by the majority of middle management as the problem. The dialogue between the two levels was perceived to be either more of a demand when a job-related task needed to be completed, or when there was a negative consequence, and a reprimand was the resultant outcome. Data uncovered that sense-making and sense-giving, as it related to the changing environmental or working context, was not provided in some instances, thereby acting as a catalyst to much of the dissatisfaction voiced. Some respondents vocalised their insights on issues as follows:-

That's the frustrating [thing] is often times they don't know, but they don't try to find out or educate themselves because you're responsible for that agency, whatever it is, and they don't make the time. I mean, I've never met with my head of the ministry unless [he/she] had a problem with something I did. (Interviewee 10 – Middle Management).

You have many times there were not the discussion that needed to be had between the HoDs [Heads of Departments] and the...Chief Officers...a lot of times where there were meetings [they] were usually on a negative side of things for opinions or advice, but [they] trying to say, well the Minister wants this, and I need this now. It's a lot of demands for that, and the communications were not as effective as it should be. (Interviewee 14 – Middle Management).

I find people just don't want to have those conversations. You know that conversation of saying; well what is it that we are actually doing here. I am sure you've had that experience. You get summoned to these meetings, and you are on a committee or in a group, and you're sitting there and you say, can you give me some information before you get to the meeting. Oh well, we haven't come up with that. Well, what are we actually doing? Well, that's what we are going to decide at the meeting. So, you go to these things and there are thirty HoDs [Heads of Departments] sitting around the table. You're sitting there going, why are we here? What are we doing? And, you get this response; you're here to plan the plan. (Interviewee 4 – Middle Management).

What I would change is the communication between the top, and.....I would create more opportunities for that kind of relationship and communication....I think that would make a big difference. (Interview 7 – Middle Management).

There seems to be a dichotomy in power relations, or the perceived treatment between the upper level of management and middle management, as it relates to communication and relational development within the leadership sphere.

Effective leadership, again, and I keep saying [it's the] connection. It's being able to connect with your people to show the care, to show the concern. Lead by example [and] make sure that you are there for them (Interviewee 6 – Upper Management).

I feel concerned that we are able to...I'm concern that we won't able to....make good on the commitments that we've made because of all the energy and all the goodwill, and all the good feelings, and stuff that we are trying to roll out and get out there. That's all

going to be undone. We are going to make people cynical and frustrated if they don't get to see the benefits of those changes. And, my concern is that we are still a very positional and leaderless organisation, worried about taking care about those at the top and forgetting about those on the bottom, and it's the bottom who vote, it's those bottomed ones who...accomplish everything that we need to get done, right (Interviewee 9- Upper Management).

5.2.3 Theme – Blame Culture

Some respondents at the middle management level, in an attempt to rationalise or make sense of what was occurring within the practice, emphasised that there were undertones of a 'blame culture', as demonstrated by comments below:

Where the blame culture is there, you know if I know that I am responsible directly for something, then I can accept blame when it comes (Interviewee 1 - Middle Management).

Whatever it is you have that same level of accountability. Don't try to blame everybody else for gaps or whatever it is and if there is something missing, let us all get together, and figure out a way to make it what it needs to be for the entire organisation, recognising that you are the leader here (Interviewee 8 – Middle Management).

Conversely, at the upper management level, alternative perspectives were expressed in that from a higher vantage point, there was no blame culture. But, rather public servants were encouraged to engage in self-reflexivity and apply lessons learned for both self and work practice improvements as demonstrated from the respondent below:-

No blame culture. At worse, we'll have you sit down with us and go through a lessons learned, what can we do different, otherwise, you know, you are big enough, you are smart enough to go and figure out what you did wrong and come back and say what you will be doing differently next time. It's a lesson learned thing, and we go and bat for folks that is just what we do (Interviewee 5 – Upper Management).

5.2.4 Theme – Reform Fatigue

The data revealed that reverberations from changes, as a result of various phases of public sector reform experienced over the years, have equally impacted both leadership levels. There are no fundamental differences in worldviews as it relates to feelings of reform fatigue. In fact, respondents, voiced concerns as to the purpose of continuous change, some respondents verbalised that the context of why the reforms were being implemented was missing, and others noted that the organisation was re-engineering processes, as opposed to changing mind-set, thereby influencing the underlying organisational culture.

Honestly speaking, I have been reformed out. I've gone through with the service, and been involved with so many reforms that were supposed to do this, and do that, and do that. It changes a little bit, but there is no monumental change....everybody that comes into [a] higher leadership role wants to put their stamp on things, so there is another reform. We see that in education, in everything else. It seems like we're doing the reform from ten years ago, and the reform from five years ago, and from two years ago, and we start a new reform, and which one are we supposed to do, where are we supposed to go....I've tried not to let it affect me (Interviewee 10 – Middle Management).

Definitely too much reform at once, too much reform back to back, sometimes it makes me wonder, well what did we actually do before (Interviewee 14 – Upper Management).

Um...the change initiatives are still sort of happening from the outside in and not from the inside out, and I don't think outside of changes are sustainable (Interviewee 5 – Upper Management).

(Laughter)...well, I feel that I think it's, well; part of me said that it is good; I still don't feel that [the] context has been established. So, I feel like we sort of, we are almost fighting against ourselves because we've got a legislative context that just doesn't quite fit. We are sort of trying to change processes. Well, on one hand, you hear that we are going to be a dynamic organisation. And, you say, well, what do you mean? Well, you know, you are going to think outside the box. And, you say, well, what do you mean by

that? You know, you are going to be cutting edge. And, you say again, what do you mean? And, you try to put it back into context. And, you say, okay, we are going to be a dynamic, fast-paced, changing organisation, but every little thing must go to Cabinet. You say well, how dynamic and fast-changing is that? (Interviewee 4 – Middle Management).

The data revealed that reform initiatives, in particular, the changing roles of Heads of Departments under new public service management, whereby there was decentralisation of activities at the departmental levels. Under this model, the Head of Department had more accountability and ownership for the agency. There is no lack of clarity in roles and responsibility, and the Heads of Departments has been reduced in some instances to line managers, with the introduction of another layer between the Chief Officer and the Head of Department, namely the Deputy Chief Officer.

I think often times the Chief Officers kind of want to be the HoD [Head of Department], and I have told them and actually some of the Ministers now, and previous Ministers that basically what they have done to the service is basically decapitate the service because you didn't hear anything about the HoDs [Head of Departments] doing anything, I mean even on a daily basis (Interview 10 – Middle Management).

5.2.5 Theme – Bureaucratic/Administrative Processes

More than half of respondents made associations with the bureaucratic or administrative processes as being the barrier to leadership. Respondents made connections to the hierarchical structure of the organisational as not being conducive to sustaining leadership. Excerpts of respondents' views are presented below:-

Our workload and our structure don't actually facilitate leadership, it facilitates administrative first, then management, and then leadership...our minds are so tied into the structure we can't go outside (Interview 14 – Upper Management).

I think Chief Officers are just as confused as us, they are just as confused, and I will let you know that sometimes I forgive, when I'm complaining, I do forgive my bosses

because I say to myself, you know what, you probably don't you either, and they are feeling as they go along too. It's not good, it's not the way it should be...but again, and to be honest, the question you asked before is correct, I have asked myself sometimes, am I expecting too much bureaucracy (Interviewee 7 – Middle Management).

5.2.6 Theme - Attitudinal Outcomes

The research findings revealed associations between relations with upper management and middle management, coupled with resultant changes from reform and weakened communications. There appears to be a disparity in the views of upper and middle management. It is recognised by upper management that there are on-going leadership issues that need to be addressed, which seem to be at the forefront of their agenda, however, this is not being translated at the middle management level. At the middle, management level, there are perceived feelings of unfairness and low morale. The following views were expressed by respondents as insights into these underlying issues emerged:-

We focus on some core values, people first, and that then leads us to make all our decisions around doing the best for our people, and the simple thought behind that is that if we take care of our folks really well, then they will take care of our customers really well (Interview 5 – Upper Management).

In a lot of cases, not in all cases, we can't say that we are a caring organisation, people need to feel it. People need to feel that care and concern. People need to know that they are appreciated at the highest levels, and people need to know, which is so very important that they carry out their jobs, and when they do the difficult decision that we've been asking them to make that we have their back (Interviewee 6 – Upper Management).

If you speak with civil servants, my personal observation is that you don't join the civil service to get rich, so it has to be an ingrained desire to serve, to make things better, to contribute to a bigger picture, that's why everybody joins the civil service. Now at some point in time...(laughter)...at some point, that drive either dampens or changes to

somewhere else, and its identifying what are the factors that are dampening that change, and at what point in your career does that take place. I think you will probably find that most civil servants just want to be given a clear task, clear objectives, proper funding, and let them go and do it. It's when the politics, the double standards, the crabs in a barrel mentality start to sink in that people start to go, okay, it's either time to move on or just collect a pay cheque (Interview 11 – Middle Management).

I would look at allowing a bit more flexibility at various leadership levels because right now it still seems to be too prescriptive, and that hinders what the government, or what the various departments can actually achieve. Often time, if you, I mean good leaders make mistakes along the way, but the only lesson you learn in a government organisation, unfortunately, is that you get disciplined for it as opposed to using that example (Interview 14 – Middle Management).

Sometimes you find people who are very knowledgeable but they lack in human relations...they [are] lacking in that they don't know how to lead people, they don't know how to get the best out of employees (Interviewee 12 – Middle Management).

5.3 Results: Content Analysis of Drawings

The results of the content analysis of the drawings depicted by Table 3, page 72 demonstrates that while some respondents drew generic representations (stick) people (30%), a surprising number either drew metaphorical (43%) representations or symbols (22%). There were some drawings that had words to explain what was occurring, or to highlight the leader. All drawings were gender neutral, so it was difficult to distinguish between male or female. Additionally, there was no depiction of violence in any of the drawings. There were two drawings that represented animals (8%), one showing an ant colony without a leader, and another showing a leader surrounded by sheep, which coincidentally, was the only drawing that depicted the people representation of a leader, in this instance, Jesus. In the drawing (Figure 1, p. 122) Jesus as the leader is surrounded by sheep as the followers, with Jesus carrying one sheep on his back.

In most of the drawings, respondents drew images that were more symbolic or metaphorical, and some images did not have any leaders or followers. There were some images, although symbolic, that showed a leader and followers, with the leader being bigger than the followers. Respondents who held leadership roles within the organisation drew images of a leader with followers (65%), and often times, the followers were smaller than the leader (30%). Images are drawn by respondents from the middle management level either drew images where the leader was represented as a bridge or the same size as the follower (30%). Leaders at the upper management level of the organisation typically drew images where the leader was bigger than followers, and often times acted as a blocker from external factors, while other images demonstrated elements of connectivity. There was one image in particular (Figure 2, p. 123), that demonstrated a richness in interconnections between people in the organisation and descriptive words such as ‘family’, or ‘team’ was used in the interpretation of the image by the respondent. Another drawing (Figure 4, p. 124), entitled ‘Sphere of Connectivity’, used the analogy of the brain to describe the complex and dynamic networks of agents within the system that came together to make up the whole system, this illustrates a level of relational activity. Figure 8, p. 127 shows the leader engaging in activities such as sense-giving and sense-making, providing followers with the context and purpose. Figure 5, p. 125 and Figure 7, p. 126 shows leadership as emergent, positional and collaborative.

5.3.1 Overview of Participant Interpretations: ‘What is a Leader?’

A few of the drawings were selected at random, and in no particular order, as a means of providing a representative sample of the images. Comparative analysis was conducted using the content analysis results in 5.3 above and the respondents own interpretations while using the existing literature for additional insight.

In the context of in-depth interviews, the drawing process enabled respondents to tap into their consciousness and access any deeply hidden thoughts, emotions, or issues and use the drawings as a reflective tool. The drawing exercise allowed respondents to express any unsaid feelings, about how they understood leadership and participated in leadership through their daily interactions. Additionally, it created the space for participants to begin to think

about how leadership is co-constructed within the public sector, and what does leadership mean within that given context. Some drawing's, captured self-disclosures or a duality of expressions as it related to participants conceptualised versions of public sector leadership. Participants used a variety of metaphorical representations to convey public sector leadership as ship a on a search and rescue mission, a sphere of connectivity (similar to the brain), a bridge between two mountains, an ant colony, a shepherd with sheep or a wave to demonstrate how leadership has progressed. Some of these models, upon closer scrutiny, point to relational leadership activity or dynamic social interactions between the actors within the system. Below are the examples of drawing from participants:-



Figure 1 [No alterations to drawing] – the leader as a shepherd.

A leader is someone who is willing to show direction, but if one needs to be carried...that's it for me (Interviewee 9 – Upper Management).

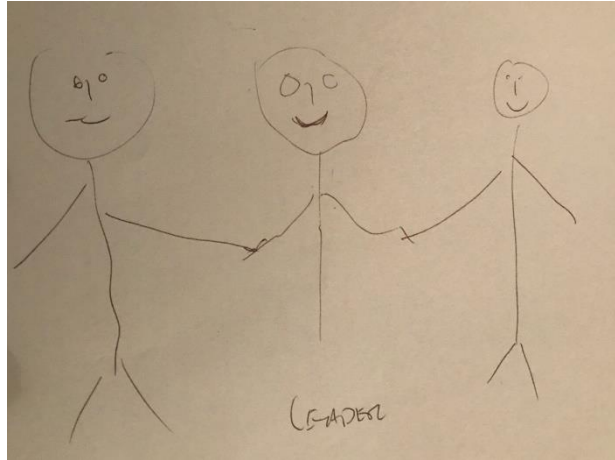


Figure 2 [No alterations to drawing] – a collaborative and relational (socially constructed) model of leadership under a positive working environment.

They are all happy with what they are doing, so you are set in a culture where it is a positive happy place to work, they are all together, they are holding hands so that is teamwork and family. And, they are all effective on the same level even though there is a leader, leading from the middle (Interviewee – 5 Upper Management).

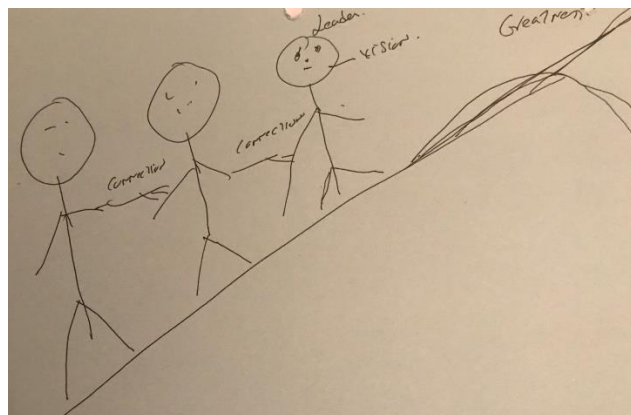


Figure 3 [No alterations to drawing] – a transformational leadership model with the leader in front setting the vision, and people engagement.

So this is our people right. And, this is our cliff down here, so this is our leader that is leading, and he is leading his staff to greatness, okay. He is going with them; he is not pushing them from behind (Interviewee 6 – Upper Management).

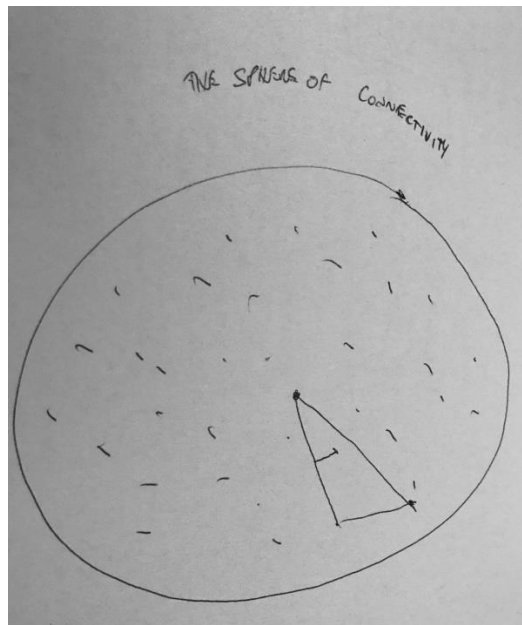


Figure 4 [No alterations to drawing] – complex and dynamic interconnections within the whole organisation.

So, what this represents is the sum of all those things and to become a whole person, to become a whole organisation, you have to make these connections as strong as possible. What it also means is that looking at the brain as an analogy is that where there is the weak connection you have to make a decision... I guess I would call it the 'sphere of connectivity' (Interviewee 14 – Upper Management).

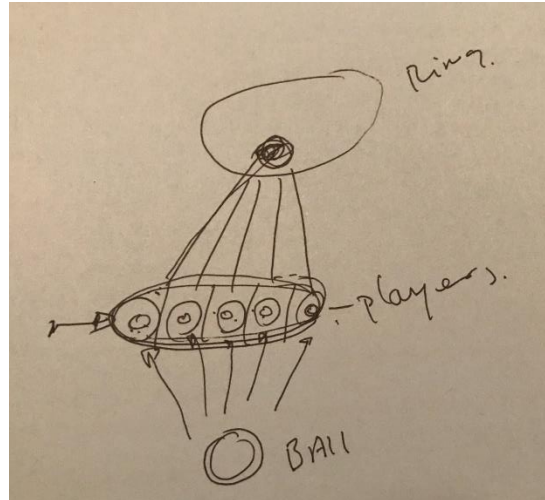


Figure 5 [No alterations to drawing] – a collaborative model of leadership.

This is a ball. This is a ring. These are the players. [You] want this ball with these five players to put it into the ring and to score. So, the ball will go to the players to put it into the ring and to score. So, the ball will go to the players and each one of them has a function to accomplish the goal among them, they will find out who the leader is among them (Interviewee 2 – Middle Management).



Figure 6 [No alterations to drawing] – a collaborative model of leadership.

I don't know if you can figure out where I am going with this. Alright, leaders...a leader is like a conductor. You have an orchestra, you might not be able to play any instruments, but he has the music which is the plan for going forward. They all get the same music, and his job is to make

sure all of this work together to produce what's on that sheet (Interviewee 10 – Middle Management).

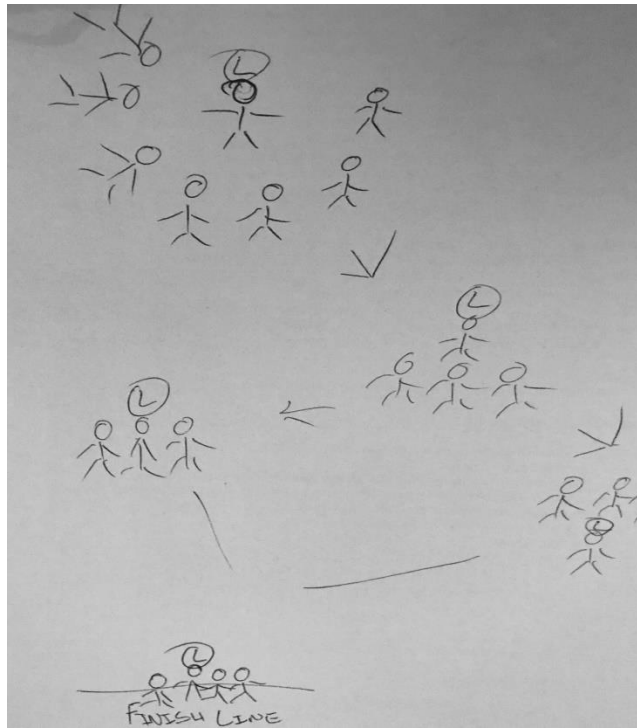


Figure 7 [No alterations to drawing] – a collaborative model of leadership.

Alright, so, your leader pretty much is responsible for a project, objective and outcome. Effectively communicate those objectives, goals, measurable to your team, and then going through your various stages of leadership during that project, so there are times when you stand side by side your people, there are times when you lead from the front, there are also times when you [need] to stand back and let them do what they need to do, and you take on that coaching, that sixty thousand foot oversight of what's going on. Yeah, and then the whole idea culminates in everybody crossing the finish line together (Interviewee 11 – Middle Management).

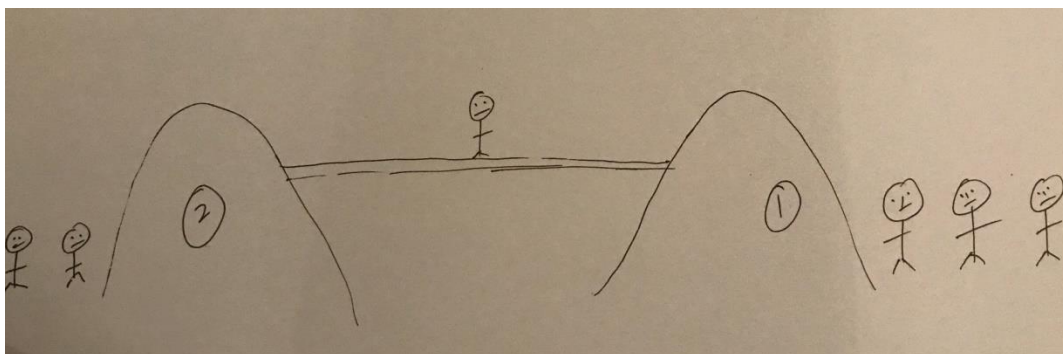


Figure 8 [No alterations to drawing] – the leader as a bridge engaging in sense-giving and sense-making.

For me I think leadership is this, it's that tool that bridges the divide because you know in life, even with our teams, everyone sort of has their different context. This group says you know number one is what we are going to do. This group says number two is what we are going to do....And they are great in executing in terms of well, I have to climb that mountain, but they fail to appreciate, well, one, why am I climbing that mountain, and what am I going to get out of that mountain. The same thing over here and to me leadership is sort of in between to help them say, well, I am going to take your great skillset in climbing that mountain, and your other great skill in doing this particular task, and I am going to give you the context and purpose and I am going to help it to actually manifest itself into something greater. So, it's that bridge that actually gets you to that point (Interviewee 4 – Middle Management).

5.4. Overview of Sense-making of Research Findings

The findings of the research are presented from the perspective of middle and upper management to provide a more balanced view. Additionally, themes from the research findings were applied to practice as action interventions by the Collaborative Inquiry Team, as a means of 'testing' relational principles to gain deeper insight. This was conducted to ascertain what would happen to aspects of relational theory when it was applied within a real-life public sector setting. For example, one of the dominant themes in the research mentioned by participants

was the lack of communications; therefore as it relates to my particular agency, action interventions focused more on dialogic activities or the communications aspects of relational leadership. The justification for drawing on relational leadership principles within practice from this perspective is that within my unique setting the data revealed that communications at the various levels of management are a problem area that required further exploration. Notwithstanding, relational leadership analytical lenses was used to explore the outcomes of the research findings. This allowed the research area to be viewed from different vantage points enabling any blind spots to emerge.

5.4.1 Sense-making through Relational Leadership Lenses

The fundamental tenets of leadership practices as underscored by the literature on relational leadership, chiefly, by authors such as Ospina and Foldy (2010); Cunliffe and Eriksen (2011) and Helstad and Moller (2013), highlighted dialogue, among other factors, when combined with the literature on relational leadership, and provided a useful framework to aid in the interpretation of the research. Recent studies on relational leadership have highlighted what it may mean to practitioners to practice leadership from a more relational standpoint, as a collective whole. In other words, within the practice, leadership acts should unfold through daily interactions with those around us, as we purposefully engage in meaning-making and sense-giving within our various contexts, which in turn may encourage reciprocal action. A central feature of leadership is to be in conversation with other actors within the system, to be cognisant of how those conversations develop, and to recognise how to effectively deal with those developments by being more responsive (Crevani, 2015).

Moreover, at the heart of the relational leadership approach is the issue of relationality, which transcends the view of leadership from the leader-centric and followership models, to frameworks that consider leadership from the vantage point of the process, context, and interactions (Ospina and Uhl-Bien, 2012). The notion of the context within the relational leadership construct plays a valuable role, as there is the interplay of the various sub-texts within specific situations in which people interact with each other. In this regard, the social context adds richness, not to mention, the embeddedness and dynamic nature of leadership, as

this allows relationality to be understood within the leadership sphere since it places emphasis on the ideological perspective that leadership is co-constructed and contextual (Ospina and Uhl-Bien, 2012).

Accordingly, the research findings documented that respondents going about the mundane of everyday organisational life experienced push and pull tensions, under the rubric cube of relational leadership from the social constructionist perspective. Most importantly is the management of meaning between actors within the system, and how meaning is co-constructed. The research demonstrated that there is a relational divide between upper and middle management, which may be constraining relational developments. The research findings extended understanding to the notion that power and positional authority may be intricately linked, suggesting that there may be power struggles within the working relations. In terms of relational development, respondents at the middle management level expressed a lack of trust and confidence in not having responsibilities being delegated down to them at the departmental level, which may be limiting relational development. This, in turn, may be contributing to the negative perception that middle management may be lacking the technical aptitude to lead their respective teams. The following excerpt of an interview at middle management level illustrates a summary of relational differences within the work practice, and with the upper management level, as discussed above:-

Interviewer: *How do you feel in this modernised context in which you currently work?*

Interviewee: *Well, I've said to people that I will work with that if you know a better way, you know, because things change constantly. And what we should strive to do is keep up with the changes to provide the service we are providing in a manner that is efficient, effective and meets the needs of your customers.....I've no problem where we identify a need for change, but sometimes we go on a fishing expedition.*

Interviewer: *I wonder, what role do you think COs [Chief Officers] and HoDs [Heads of Departments] play, and how would you describe the environment in which they work?*

Interviewee: *I think the roles of Chief Officers and HoDs are different. Um, I see the role of the Chief Officers as setting policy...and let me drive the car as the HoD...I think often times the Chief Officers kind of want to be the HoD...what I find now is that there is this fine line between a Chief Officer and people in the ministry and the HoD...they don't have the necessary people skills...they are just not confident to be able to delegate that responsibility to the HoDs and let them do what they need to do (Interviewee – Middle Management 10).*

The above links with themes found in the literature on tensions expressed within power relations, as discussed by Helstad and Moller (2013). Similarly, within public sector institutions, a leader's actions and utterances may project imageries in the minds of those they lead, which in turn may shape actions taken as a result (Smircich and Morgan, 1982). In other words, the leader's actions may create the context or frame the experience of the actors within the system, as seen with the Head of Departments above, as they attempt to make sense of the situation, thereby interpreting the broader context of the events that has taken place, representing their version of reality. Drawing on Smircich and Morgan (1982) to offer an interpretation of the findings, once the event has been experienced and framed, it is interpreted; and the context is set for meaningful action to transpire. However, in the case of the leader, the primary challenge is to manage meaning or to engage in meaning-making in such a way that actors within the system are able to align themselves to how the leader has defined the situation (Smircich and Morgan, 1982). Contrary to the literature, there is no evidence from the findings to demonstrate that Chief Officers engaged in meaning-making, it would appear that Heads of Departments have been categorically placed within the bracket of 'technical expert', a role viewed within the formal organisational structure as not having a predisposition of leadership competencies.

Paradoxically, when exploring the findings from the content analysis of the drawings undertaken by participants, in particular, the drawings by middle management, models demonstrate collaboration within the leadership construct (see Figure 5, p. 125 and Figure 7, p.126). This would suggest that leadership is being understood and enacted at the

departmental level, which is contrary to what was depicted by the upper management level. A possible explanation for this divide is the inherent organisational structure, post the various reform initiatives, therefore there appears to be lack of role clarity at the various levels, which may be constraining relationality between upper and middle management levels. However, these results should be interpreted with caution, given that some respondents voiced that issues experienced were not global, as it was dependent on the type of relationship one had with their Chief Officer.

Drawing on the literature on relational leadership, the research findings demonstrated the interconnected nature of power and authority, chiefly; when power is used in a trustworthy manner it facilitates trust (Cunliffe and Eriksen, 2011). Although there was no strong evidence to make a direct correlation between trust and power within the research findings, there is room to explore the implications of the aforementioned within public sector practice. Specifically, what needs to be done to practice relational leadership at upper and middle management levels so that there is perceived fairness and equality across the entire public service as relations progress? Likewise, the research findings illustrated that it was evident, however, that relational leadership is not one-sided (Cunliffe and Eriksen, 2011); and having relational integrity and mutual respect for others (Cunliffe and Eriksen, 2011) was essential in ensuring the long-term sustainability of working relations.

Correspondingly, within a formalised system like the public sector there are clear lines of authority as seen within the roles of Chief Officers and Head of Departments. However, the research findings confirmed that conversations and dialogue within the practice are critical for relational developments. This was underscored through the research as the majority of participants highlighted the need for genuine dialogue with upper management. This is congruent with themes in the literature on the importance of creating open dialogue, Cunliffe and Eriksen (2011); Ospina and Foldy (2010); Helstad and Moller (2013); dialogic communications; Barge and Fairhurst (2008); how people employ discourse to comprehend action within organisation communications, and engage in meaning-making; Barge (2012) is paramount for moving the relational agenda forward within organisations.

Congruent with the above, one of the respondents at middle management level drew an image of what their conceptualised model of leadership depicted (Figure 6, p. 149). This model provided a metaphorical representation of a musical band with a conductor leading the band, as shown below:-

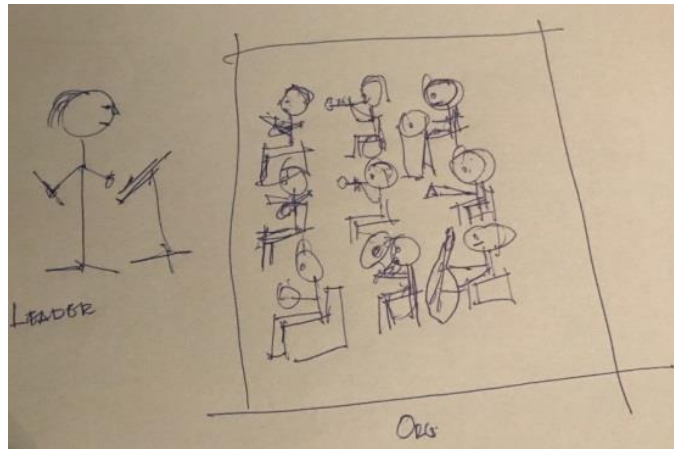


Figure 6 [No alternations to drawing] – collaborative model of leadership.

An interpretation of how leadership is co-constructed within practice could be employed by drawing on the musical analogy depicted above, which suggests that leadership is indeed a plural process (Bathurst and Ladkin, 2012), as it eschews the traditional leader-centric model. However, findings from the research, in particular, within a public sector setting showed that there is a distinct hierarchy, with established roles such as Chief Officers, Heads of Departments, and so forth. Contrary to this, leaders within this system may proffer the leader-centric and followership models, solely from the vantage point of claiming that leaders are the ones responsible for visioning and setting direction. While these arguments may offer some merit, the findings suggest that should the public sector stay the course with its current approach to leadership, whereby compartmentalised roles, mind-sets, and the structural boundaries coupled with change from the various reform does not foster relational development, then its approach to leadership may not be effective to meet the challenges ahead.

Drawing on Bathurst and Ladkin (2012), again, using the musical analogy to explore relational leadership as an emergent process, whereby meaning is co-constructed by actors

within the system. As discussed, the image in Figure 6 on page 125, with the musical band and the conductor, an interpretation of the image demonstrates a readiness (Bathhurst and Ladkin, 2012) and willingness to engage in the process of leadership. In efforts to glean further insights and to draw a parallel with principles from relational leadership, the emergent interactions by the group could be akin to simple motions or gestures found in the mundane of everyday work practice, whereby colleagues affirm each other (Cunliffe and Eriksen, 2011; Bathurst and Ladkin, 2012).

Within practice, interactions through microscopic subtleties could take shape through affirmative actions via the various levels, for example, Chief Officers and Head of Departments, through everyday discourse could display affirmative action through simple gestures like a nod, a smile, or exchange of glances. Moreover, this links to themes in the literature on value commitments which helps to explore the systemic constructionist approach to leadership, in particular, the notion of affirmation, which suggests that the leader creates ways in which connections are made through talk and action (Barge, 2012). Although there was no evidence in the research to show that there were complex social responses between the upper and middle management, or any other interactions as described above, at the department level, there was evidence of leaderful activity occurring as the Collaborative Inquiry Team engaged with the research area.

As discussed, the relational leadership approach provides an alternative understanding of public sector leadership allowing one to access and appreciate the reality of what is occurring within the practice. Drawing on the relational lens, we are recognising the hidden threads that connect actors within multiple and intricate layers of a complex system, such as the public sector, as they engage in leadership processes and relationships as part of their own inter-subjective worldviews. The research findings demonstrated that leadership is not solely equated to one's hierarchal position within the organisation, but rather is congruent with attributing factors of Raelin's notion of leaderful practice, in which leadership is described as emergent, where a group participates fully and simultaneously as a collective whole (Raelin, 2005; Raelin 2011). During collaborative sessions, the team was actively engaged in self-

reflexivity and relational sessions that were situated within a specific moment in time within the research setting. These sessions impacted the team as a whole through actions taken. In other words, we were changed through interactions in these social processes. This, in turn, helped the team to engage in sense-making and sense-giving through dialogic activity or the in-between spaces of our conversations, in essence, what Bradbury and Lichtenstein call the “space between” (2000, p. 551).

These activities provided insight into how leadership was being constructed within practice as the team went about creating meaningful dialogue with each other. These findings could be interpreted to offer supporting evidence from practice that relational leadership is about being cognisant of the multilingualness or heteroglossic nature of the dialogue and being mindful of the possibility of what resides within the interaction of those conversational gaps (Cunliffe and Eriksen, 2011). It is recognising the subtle inter-subjective nature of complex social responses that take place within those spaces between people.

Moreover, in a dynamic environment like the public sector that is subject to constant change as a result of internal and external pressures, the inter-subjective nature of the human experiences (Cunliffe, 2011), or how people draw meaning from those experiences, is essential in understanding how the entire collaborative team were involved as insiders, including the researcher, and the readership, in order to gain in-depth insight from what the leadership conversation is about, in addition to how insight is transpiring (Cunliffe, 2011). In terms of altering management’s view of leadership, offering an interpretation of the above is that associations could be made here to the notion that relationality draws on aspects of leadership as “being-in-relation-to-others” (Cunliffe and Erikson, 2011, p. 1430). This links to aspects of how the working relationship is being developed, the nature and the quality of those relationships.

5.5 Phase 5: Translating Outcomes into Action Interventions

As the primary goal is to make improvements to practice, outcomes from the data analysis phase helped to make an informed decision as to action interventions, and as such, the

resultant outcomes were fed directly into the 'taking action' stage (Coughlan and Brannick, 2010). Therefore, the interpretation of the data allowed for a conceptualised framework to evolve that could strengthen the relational aspect of leadership, and commence the use of action interventions to shape our practice. Thus, working within the PAR construct, it was decided that we would explore the various themes for strengthening leadership through action research cycles of observing, planning, acting and reflecting by using strategic planning exercises for the agency as the vehicle. The various themes identified through the data analysis would be tested within a work practice setting. For example, lack of communication was one of the issues raised, therefore the plan was to integrate various communications strategies into our immediate environment, by applying multiple communication methodologies, and being mindful of when they should be used and why.

Action interventions provided a method to test communicating within the practice, especially as it was viewed that leaders should communicate effectively. This thematic intervention process worked well for a few sessions until it was decided to inculcate aspects of the above themes into our working environment through a more structured approach. We discussed using the recursive action research cycles (Parkin 2009, p. 26), and it was decided that for each theme presented above, we would plan an action intervention and reflect on the process and re-evaluate the situation. Apart from the above, the notion was to engage the team, and to facilitate thought-provoking discussions on how a relational model for leadership could be applied to the public service, particularly using the PAR framework to other sectors within the service, for example, education, health or police for the resolution of socioeconomic issues involving the community. The underlying philosophy was to create a democratic process where the on-going dialogue was used to help us to think about our social world in a more complex manner while reflecting on the action interventions of the various themes.

5.6 Phase 7: Action Interventions through PAR

Prior to engaging in action research, I had read extensively on the process, and the emergent nature of the approach, however, the concept of working with the unknown was disconcerting. There was no detailed plan describing what to do next. It has become evident

from practice that there is no panacea or one best way to conduct action research within a corporate environment. Nonetheless, looking beyond the pragmatics of the circumstances, sense-making came from considering the underlying philosophy that science is indeed “humans in action” (Greenwood and Levin, 2007, p. 86), and as humans, sometimes we learn through trial and error. Drawing on Greenwood and Levin (2007) as a means of expounding on the above point, I reminded myself that the concept of planned intervention activities as a method of discovery, postulates that science is a “highly iterative and dynamic activity involving repeated action-reflection-action cycles” (p. 86). In other words, we have to continue the iterative cyclic process of observing, planning, acting and evaluating, paying attention to our emotions, assumptions, biases, and judgements. Therefore, maintaining a level of mindfulness of the above precepts helped to influence my perspective on action research. I interacted with relational leadership theory literature, focusing on the role that communication and dialogue plays in creating meaning within the leadership construct. The literature on the discipline of dialogue provided the lenses to alter our meeting styles.

Dialogue is not a novel concept. It is premised on the underlying notion of bringing people together as a means of helping them to “learn how to think”, not from the sole vantage point of shared problem analysis, but rather to delve into an exploration of underlying assumptions and the reasons why they surface (Isaacs, 1993). Dialogue, as a discipline, is underpinned by the centrality of organisation learning, given its promising nature to facilitate shared thinking and communication (Isaacs, 1993). Dialogue, as a practice, is centred on exposing and inquiring into a feedback loop of one’s interpretive and internal structure (Isaacs, 1993). Moreover, there would be a back and forth movement between our perceptions and our reality, which provides a fragmented view of the world. It is only when we take a step back to examine our thinking, and why we are thinking the way we are thinking, we can make sense of a situation for purposeful change to occur. Arguably, we are moving towards triple-loop learning (Isaacs, 1993), whereby we begin to reframe our thinking in a more complex manner to address the ‘why’ questions. In other words, what is leading us towards a predisposition to work within a hierarchal leadership framework? Why did we choose to engage in leadership this way? In essence, enacting triple-loop learning within practice facilitates inquiry to reveal

the hidden, 'why' questions as we probe deeper (Isaacs, 1993). In this instance, the dialogue would appear to be an effective tool, and integrating it into practice would complement our current PAR approach, and it would allow us to explore our practice through fresh eyes.

Consequently, post reflection on what went well and what did not work, the team had a paradigmatic shift in how we would engage in inquiry. Therefore, as of 6 September 2016, the team transitioned to meeting informally through, what was termed, Coffee Morning Meetings, which were arranged every Friday morning between 8:30 am to 9:30 am. The concept was to establish a more responsive team, one that would be integrated into practice by scheduling these gatherings as intentional action research intervention sessions, whereby we would continually engage in discussions around leadership. Enacting the action research cycles (observe, plan, act and evaluate) was used to refine how we approached leadership within our own organisation, through a tripartite framework of the individual, the team, and the wider public service. As a team, the all-encompassing question was, 'what commonalities resides in our collective understanding and experiences in how public sector leadership is constructed?' Ultimately, this question slowly inculcated a seismic shift in mind-set, taking the focus away from 'them' and putting it on "me", and by extension "us", as we considered the phrase, 'I am part of the problem and the problem is part of me' (Pedler, 2008).

Subsequently, meeting rules were adjusted, and it was agreed that we would meet every Friday until we begin to see results. There was no set agenda, but we broadly looked at points of dialogue on leadership themes. During Coffee Morning sessions, as a team, we began to inquire openly as it related to deep-seated assumptions, values, and beliefs. We explored our emotions and how these feelings could themselves be viewed as the stimulus for animosity and cynicism. The dialogue created the avenue for thought-provoking insight and subsequent challenges with the overall system. It tested our way of thinking, for example, during one session we were asked to consider our theories in use and to examine our own biases and assumptions as we engaged with leadership within our own areas. The team was transitioning to a microcosmic representation of how we re-conceptualised what leadership should represent in the wider public service.

The use of dialogue, as evidenced by practice, served to be a valuable tool to assist the team with collective thinking (Isaacs, 1993). Accordingly, the dialogue in this sense can generate a working arena when people deliberately engage “in the participation of shared meaning” (Isaacs, 1993, p. 26). The discipline of dialogue provided the platform for the Collaborative Inquiry Team to actively engage in risk-taking, while at the same time feeling safe, or what Isaacs (1993, p. 38) terms as interacting in “safely dangerous environments”. The excerpts below from team members’ reflections demonstrates what transpired when people engaged in dialogue and open themselves up as mentioned above. Quotations are cited verbatim giving individuals a ‘voice’, however, coding such as Team member 1, and so forth is used to assure anonymity and maintain confidentiality in alignment with ethical principles.

I thought the initiation of the meetings was a positive step going forward CoreGov Communication at the beginning...some colleagues felt more restricted, but as we continued to meet we got more relaxed, and we were able to communicate our feelings better (Reflection, Team Member 1).

At the beginning of our meetings, it appeared that my colleagues and myself were all quite hesitant to voice any concerns or opinions, and I believe [it was] kind of, why are we here? And, we’re not going to be listened to anyways, mentality was present. However, very soon, it became apparent that our thoughts and honest feedback and answers were welcomed and appreciated; everyone started to open up (Reflection, Team Member 2).

Coffee Morning Meetings continued to focus on leadership concepts, predominantly exploring complex and dynamic interrelations by drawing on relational leadership theory. This is explored primarily from the positionality of incorporating a vision of change, where the desired state is a reconceptualisation of leadership, not as something we do, but how we intend to be. In other words, redefining the way we work to reflect the concept of leadership as practice, where leadership is integrated at all levels within the organisation (Raelin, 2014). This alternative perspective asks us, as a team, to accept a level of discomfort as we move away from our comfort zones and hierarchical positional status. It asks us to embrace a genuinely

collaborative and participatory approach when dealing with messy and complex real-life issues, and each other. The following is an image (Figure 9 – below), drawn by one of the team members demonstrating how they perceived the reconstruction of leadership, as a result of their engagement with PAR.

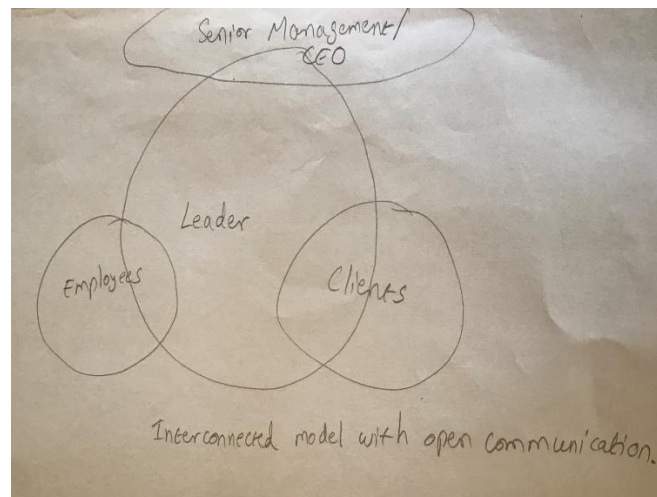


Figure 9 – [No alterations to drawing] – leadership as interconnected with open communication

Journal entry: I am becoming more aware of myself and others. If there is a particular project to be completed, I find myself thinking more about my approach to leadership and what are my theories in action and my espoused theories. I engage in mindfulness, thinking about the ‘what ifs’, and the ‘why’, for example what would happen if I engage in one type of leadership as opposed to another? How will this affect the individual(s) and, what outcome am I seeking? What is influencing my thinking, and why? I engage in dialogue. I open myself up.

Reflective box 6 – ‘Coffee Morning Meetings’.

The overall process of how PAR was enacted within my department by leaning heavily on the discipline of dialogue is depicted in Diagram 5, p. 141. The diagram represents how we engaged with the various iterations of action research cycles as we interacted with the problem. Our theory in use drew on principles of relational theory as a means of understanding both the relational and the emotive elements at play within the leadership construct. We attempted to discover what would happen to elements of relational leadership theory, as we attempted to enact relational principles to practice, for example, we were particularly

interested in dialogue as the vehicle for understanding how leadership is constructed and sustained over time, as communication was one of the themes that were cited the most during the data collection stage.

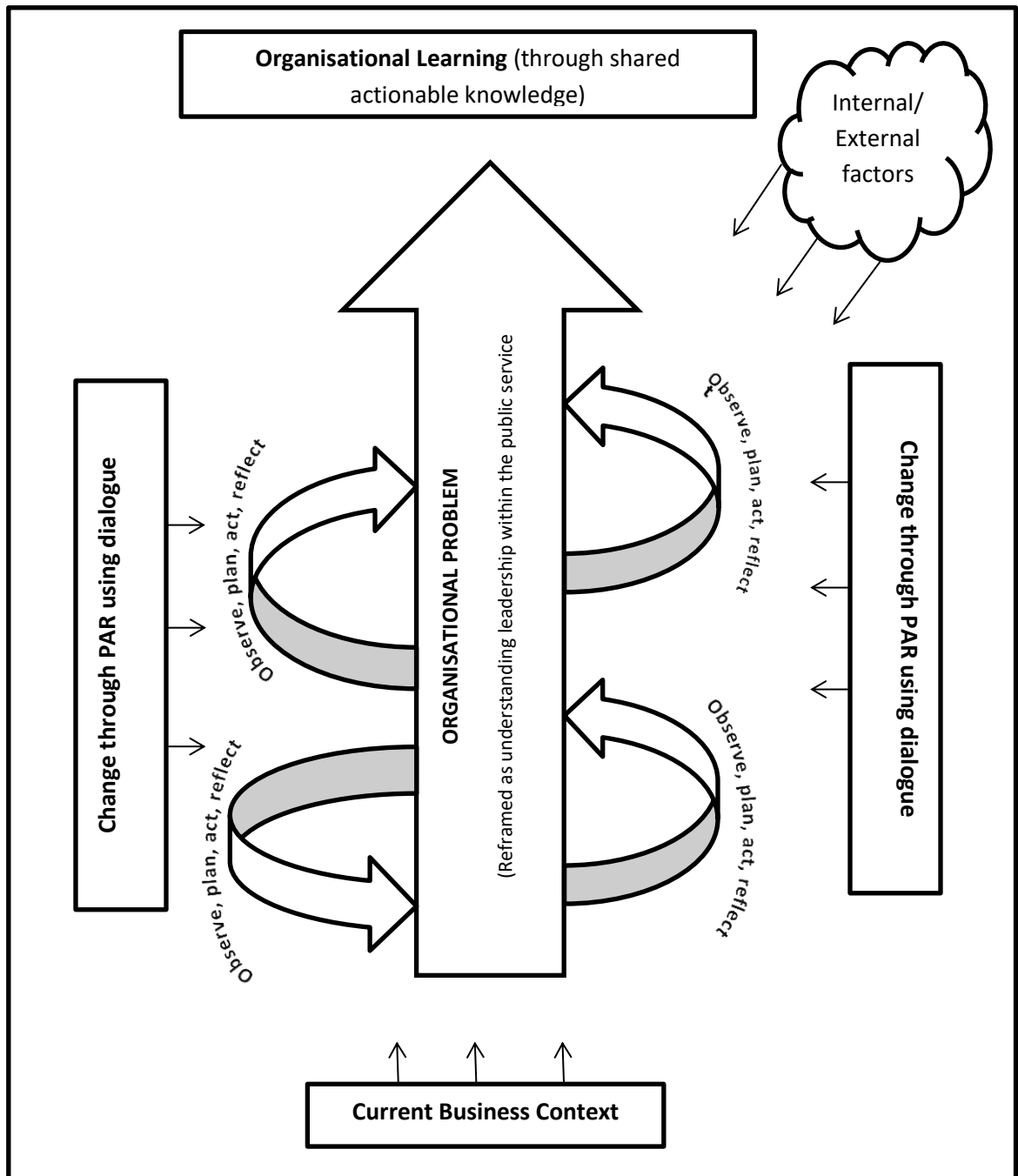


Diagram 5 – Engagement with the research area through PAR adapted from Burns (2016).

The research revealed that leadership outcomes were possible even within a highly structured bureaucratic organisation through dialogic activity. These findings emerged through the interactions with the research area by the Collaborative Inquiry Team within a PAR framework. One of the key areas which extended understanding to managerial practice within a

public sector setting is the area of power in conversations and positioning. For example, during the Coffee Morning Meetings, a team member reflected:-

At the beginning of our meetings, it appeared that my colleagues and myself were all quite hesitant to voice any concerns or opinions, and I believe [it was] kind of, why are we here? And, we're not going to be listened to anyways, mentality was present. However, very soon, it became apparent that our thoughts and honest feedback and answers were welcomed and appreciated; everyone started to open up (Reflection, Team Member, 2).

The above links to themes in the literature on position theory and making positions within conversations (Barge, 2012; Crevani, 2015), drawing on the metaphor of dance, the leader needs to be more responsive, being acutely aware of their partner, and open up the space for other voices to be heard (Crevani, 2015). For example, in the above excerpt, team members, were given the space to voice candid concerns and provide feedback, whereby as the scholar-practitioner, and equally, Director or leader within my own organisation, I was cognisant that using the 'making positions' model, I did not make the first move. As shown in Diagram 1 below, using this model to explore linguistic utterance, the leader always takes the second turn (Barge, 2012). This enabled the flow of conversation to unfold, in addition, throughout the action research interventions, the Collaborative Inquiry Team developed trust among each other fostering a positive environment for relations to develop.

Utterance (1)→ **Leader's Utterance (2)**←→ Utterance (3)

Diagram 1 - Making Positions – adapted from Barge (2012, p. 3453 in Advancing Relational Leadership Research, Uhl-Bein and Ospina, 2012; Pearce, 2008).

The findings in this research present a case for the use of relational leadership principles in the public sector to assist in extending understanding of how leadership is constructed and operationalised to ensure that leadership within the services are taking purposeful action. Further, subscribing to the notion that leadership is a 'way of being' (Cunliffe and Eriksen, 2011), it embodies a practice that reconceptualises the way leaders, organisational

members and by extension, stakeholders are viewed within the relational construct. This becomes especially important as the operational environment in which the public sector continues to do business evolves.

Although the research extended understanding of public sector leadership by using relational lenses, one substantial area that requires further exploration is the unique public sector context, specifically working collaboratively with private sector organisations. If essential aspects are about being mindful of subtle relational interactions, then introducing stakeholders as another variable could add greater insight into the complex social responses. This area becomes particularly important for issues of national significance when dealing with messy problems, such as health or education, which require an array of contributors across multiple disciplines to resolve. Further field work situated around these conversations with leaders and members external to the organisation would add another dimension to explore relational leadership.

The relational leadership framework provided an invaluable approach to help extend conversations on public sector leadership, predominately within its unique context, complex setting, and highly bureaucratic structure. The research findings have helped to enhance knowledge and understanding of the organisational problem being explored in that it aids professional practice by joining the conversation on relational leadership (Ospina, 2017). For example, Ospina (2017) advocates that public administrators are exceptionally positioned to connect with other scholars studying relational leadership theories. The argument is that counterparts in the public sector, from their unique vantage points, offer a different context, in this instance, “the publicness of the study”, which has the potential to redefine relational leadership (Ospina, 2017, p. 284).

The next section is the concluding chapter which will entail the implications of this research. In addition, it will provide some reflections on the overall process and my development as a scholar-practitioner.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS AND REFLECTIONS

“No man ever steps in the same river twice, for it is not the same river and he is not the same man.” (Heraclitus, Philosopher, 535-475 BCE).

6.1 Introduction

The last chapter delved into discussions surrounding interpretations and explanations of the research findings; by drawing on the principles of relational leadership theory to posture oneself to make an informed view. This chapter will focus on the conclusions, reflections, and implications of the research findings. It will consider the conclusions of the research, which is consistent with an emergent inquiry under the broad umbrella of action research. Within the action research remit, there are on-going tensions between drawing definitive conclusions from the research, while at the same time staying open and reflexive to knowledge generation, whereby knowledge is akin to a process of becoming. In this chapter, I will bring forward ideas on reflexivity and critical reflexivity mentioned in Chapter Three by Cunliffe and Jun (2005), as this may help with knowledge transfer and learning within the organisational practice. The notion of having reflexive public sector leaders is congruent with the research findings, in that it is asking leaders to be open to new perspectives on leadership and to consider alternative views of working.

Moreover, this chapter will explore whether the research questions have been addressed, and it will consider the area of validity and reliability of the research findings, even as it discusses the limitations of the research. The chapter concludes by suggesting possible questions for future research exploration within public sector leadership, in efforts to add to on-going conversations within the general discipline of leadership.

6.2 Purpose of Research

The research set out with the primary aim to explore how principles of relational leadership theory are applicable to the public sector to gain deeper insight into leadership practice. Areas for consideration included how leadership was constructed and sustained, with

an aim to ascertain an in-depth understanding of which factors impact this relationship and how actors within the system dealt with those changes. Additionally, the research explored how leadership surfaced with dynamic interactions between agents within the system, and the extent to which the evolving public sector context influences how leadership is enacted and understood. Data was gathered through interviews, which was later used by the Collaborative Inquiry Team to test themes raised by interviews through iterative action interventions cycles. The underlying premise was to assess elements of relational leadership theory that were relevant to the organisation and to see what would happen to those principles when applied to practice.

6.3 Addressing the Research Questions

As a dual scholar-practitioner, it was my intention to explore the research problem and to generate actionable knowledge, both for practical outcomes and to embed the ideology of reflexivity within the practice. Most notably, as practitioners, how we can begin to think about the way leadership is practiced in relation to others (Cunliffe and Eriksen, 2011), and how we can start to think about our practice in more complex ways. The chosen methodology enabled the research to explore leadership within public sector practice using the relational lens, which helped to extend understanding, predominantly on issues relating to leadership, as grounded within a unique context. The issues of relational configurations between upper and middle management and power distance sensitivities helped to shed light on hierarchal structures within bureaucracies, and how this could potentially influence relationships.

Addressing the overarching question, in which principles of relational leadership theory could be applied to the public sector, was achieved through action intervention cycles by the Collaborative Inquiry Team. Practical and actionable knowledge was brought to the forefront from the findings of this research, most notably the use of dialogue and positioning within the relational configuration. The objectives of the research were achieved in that findings sought to address sub-questions, and research outcomes showed that factors affecting the leadership dynamic include changes from reform, inherent issues with hierarchical structure and power and positional authority. Leadership was seen as emergent through action

intervention cycles when dialogue was used within the practice, in particular, through complex and dynamic social interactions between people. This demonstrates that leadership if given space can occur through everyday interactions, and confirmed through subtle minute affirmations. Additionally, using dialogue within practice illustrated how actors within the system engaged in the meaning-making when reflexivity was incorporated.

Research findings resonated with work in the literature by Cunliffe and Eriksen (2011) on establishing an open dialogue, where there is a need to be responsive leaving room for everyday conversations to emerge. This is coupled with the notion of showing respect and having an understanding for others (Cunliffe and Eriksen, 2011). In addition, the concept of becoming more attuned to sensing and being responsive within conversations could be viewed as parallel to findings in the research on positioning within conversations. There is support in that a synergistic interplay of ideas is seen, as the underlying factors presuppose that one is applying a form of reflexivity within the dialogue. For example, taking a few moments to think about what one would like to say or how to respond, in addition to active listening, and sense-making surrounding the context of the conversation builds relational leadership elements.

Moreover, support for the findings is found in the literature by Helstad and Moller (2013), as seen in the interactions between the hierarchical layers within a school system, and the tensions that can emerge. This study demonstrated how trust is developed when it is used in a trustworthy manner and that talk and action does produce results, in addition to the “give and take” in the leadership relational construct (Helstad and Moller, 2013, p. 259). Juxtaposed to the research findings were alternative perspectives found in the literature by Ospina and Foldy (2010), chiefly, the notion of establishing equitable governance mechanism, making attention more personal, and being cognisant of strategic value variances. A plausible explanation for these differences when compared to the findings is the contextual circumstances involved in the research agendas. For example, Ospina and Foldy’s (2010) research is representative of a narrow and understudied sample population. In addition, social change organisations, as the authors noted, differ from public agencies or other firms. Moreover, another possible explanation for some of the research findings emerging could be

explained as a result of the research context, the selected methodology, and possibly the research questions which have shaped some of the resultant outcomes.

6.4 Contributions to Practice

The contribution to actionable knowledge for work practice improvements is from the platform of “internal generalisability” (Popplewell and Hayman, 2012, p. 13), where this research endeavours to show practical knowledge within a localised setting, which could possibly be replicated, and extended using relational lenses to explore discursive practices. In this way, this thesis provides scaffolding and builds cumulatively on the existing body of knowledge on public sector practice. In particular, it adds to the discourse on administrative leadership within the Caribbean Region, an area that is lacking. This thesis contributes to practice, as proposed by the research findings in the followings ways:-

1. Understanding how dialogue can be used to create shared meaning and facilitate a readiness to collectively engage in leadership, reducing tensions from power distance relationships within the hierarchical structure.
2. Understanding how reflexivity could be embedded and utilised within public sector practice to encourage the testing of taken for granted assumptions, biases, beliefs, values, and actions surrounding leadership practices to become more leaderful within a participatory framework.
3. At the relational level, extend understanding of how leadership can be sustained and reciprocated within practice through everyday discourse by subtle and dynamic microscopic interactions from simple gestures.
4. Greater insight into the use of positioning within conversations between leaders and organisational members.
5. Understanding the impact of reform on public sector leadership, most notably, continuous change and resultant attitudinal outcomes, which has the potential to impact relational developments within the practice.

Within the relational leadership framework, offering an alternative interpretation of administrative leadership from the typical leader-centric or leader-follower models, in that leadership is collaborative, emergent, being in a meaningful working relationship with others, and working to develop and sustain those relationships.

6.5 Action Plan and Interventions

As a result of the research findings and subsequent analysis, the action plan devised, with specific points already incorporated into practice include the following:-

1. CoreGov underwent a review, which resulted in an overall agency restructure to be less hierarchical, and to incorporate a more collaborative framework with a Senior Management Team as shown below:-

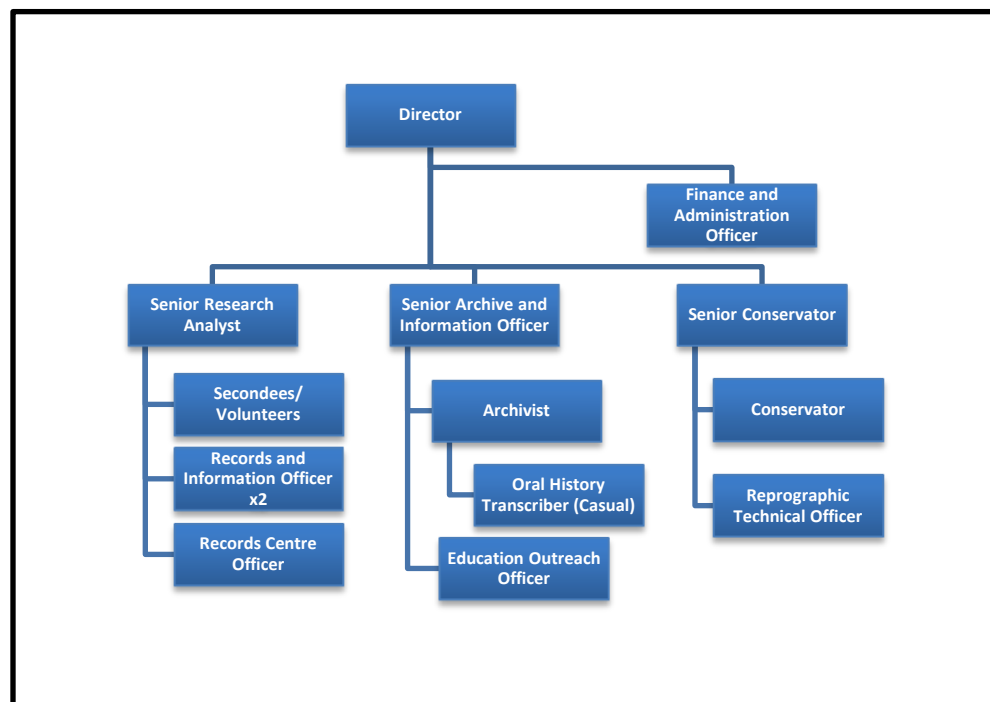


Diagram 6 – CoreGov Organisation Chart

2. A review of job descriptions and working arrangements, resulting in some positions (titles) being changed, in addition to clarity of roles and responsibilities to be in alignment with a more collaborative approach to working.

3. The assistance of an external coach was sought to conduct an overall human resources exercise, which resulted in feedback identifying dysfunctional team dynamics in certain areas of CoreGov, requiring on-going coaching sessions with individuals.

While this will be an on-going process, the above highlights some of the action points that are nearing completion. However, work has begun to take shape in other areas of the organisation, which include coaching in communication practices, and so forth. It is hopeful that relational leadership principles will be inculcated into everyday practice as we strive to become more leaderful (Raelin, 2014), where de-emphasis is on the individual, and there is an embracing of the collective.

A plan of action resulting from this thesis which speaks to both leadership and communications was the submission of a project charter proposal to establish a Civil Service Toastmasters chapter. The idea is to create a community of practice setting, which is peer-led in that civil servants can gain transferable skills both in the art of leadership and communications. The project proposal was approved by senior management for implementation within the wider government. The researcher will play a leadership role not just in introducing the club but managing it going forward. Further, a partnership was forged with the 2017-2018 Area Director, who has oversight for the Toastmasters Programme within District 81, Division B, Area 14. The Area Director will provide guidance on the governance structure and setup. Feedback from the Collaborative Inquiry Team and senior public sector management were receptive to the idea, especially as benefits would aid in the development of leadership skills for public servants. Likewise, mechanisms in place as per the charter proposal include regular meetings with the Head of the Civil Service and the Chief Officer to provide bi-monthly updates the implementation progress or to escalate any emerging issues. A committee to implement the Toastmasters chapter was also established in which the researcher will work in a facilitator capacity.

6.6 Implications of the Results

The implications of these research findings for managerial practice is that knowledge generated was produced by drawing on the action research approach, which is in direct contravention to the traditional scientific method of inquiry. Useful knowledge for work practice improvement was generated by gaining deeper insight from the inter-subjective realities of participants' views and experiences, and the meanings they attach to those experiences. The findings have significant implications for managerial practice in two respects. Firstly, it contributes to work practice outcomes by joining in conversations and creating the space for practitioners within the public sector realm to take the initial step and ask critical questions of themselves and their practice, so that others can begin to think about organisational practice in more meaningful ways. Secondly, it contributed to conversations on public sector leadership, and by extension, the general discipline of leadership by drawing on the relational leadership theory, and its applicability for reframing administrative leadership. This research provided the unique context to understand and explore leadership from a relational perspective, as noted by Ospina (2017).

6.7 Limitations of the Research

The research was grounded on social constructionist, interpretivist strategies to explore how meaning is actively produced, and the manner in which meanings are related to organisational practice (Schultz and Hatch, 1996). The boundaries of the research were situated within a small unique localised public sector context in the Caribbean region. Moreover, the research inquiry drew heavily on the underlying foundations of PAR. In addition, the research extended understanding by mobilising a Collaborative Inquiry Team at the departmental level within a public sector agency, where participants focused on the use of dialogue within the leadership construct. Participants engaged in iterative action research cycles to explore the elements of the research problem, where reflexivity was built into the process of inquiry. These are all unique to the research situation and presupposes that knowledge being generated here is not finite, but an on-going process, where knowledge being produced is emergent and continuous.

Therefore, in this research context, knowledge on leadership is dialogical, emergent, relationally, culturally and contextually bound. It represents a pluralist perspective of leadership, coupled with many voices interweaved into the research process. This makes transferability and generalisability of the research findings somewhat limited, given its local context and interpretations. Notwithstanding, findings in this research may not be relevant to all public sector institutions, specifically, those that have not considered reform from a new public service agenda. In this way, this research reflects similar limitations to research claims found by Cunliffe and Eriksen (2011) in the inconsistencies and confines of basing claims on assertions of the research participants beliefs. Further, the authors did not have the opportunity to return to the field to conduct in-depth research or participant observations, which is a similar constraint with this research. Accordingly, findings of this research should be approached as a source of inquiry, and as an opportunity to engage in further discussion on public sector leadership, and not as generalised claims. Another limitation of the study is that the research was conducted within a single entity within government. Although CoreGov bears similarities to other public sector agencies, and it is subject to the same regulations and procedures, there may be other circumstances that may not have been accounted for, which goes beyond the scope of this thesis.

6.8 Validity and Reliability

The research design selected is grounded in the social constructionist framework, and it is broadly interpretivist in nature. Therefore, the approach to actionable knowledge generation and interpretation is guided by principles from the aforementioned. When thinking about validity and reliability, it could be argued that action research may require criteria of its own (Coghlan and Brannick, 2010); Popplewell and Hayman, 2012) to judge the quality of work produced. Moreover, the concept of validity and authenticity within the action research approach could be advanced from the position of dialectics and reflexivity. In other words, does the research demonstrate multiple perspectives?

Winters (2002) suggests that achieving reflexivity is undertaking self-questioning in that each voice questions itself relative to the other voices that are represented in the research

process. In terms of dialectics and reflexivity, this was achieved by incorporating many voices into the process from various actors within the system that was affected by the organisational problem, and which represented a microcosm of the wider public sector. The multiplicity of voices resonated through interview interventions and action interventions within practice through the Collaborative Inquiry Team. Reflexivity was achieved from a dualistic perspective in that interview questions were designed to facilitate critical questioning insight of oneself and one's practice, as seen in the visual drawings by participants. In efforts to expand our thinking, we can draw broadly on Antonacopolou (2018) by considering how we can engage in sense-making, in other words, how do we come to our "senses, literally and metaphorically" (p. 7). This translates to practice as becoming more aware of critical moments that may help us to interact retrospectively, within real time, as we engage with the world around us through our daily activities (Antonacopolou, 2018).

Moreover, drawing on Antonacopoulou (2018) provided insight into the re-energisation of how reflexivity could be fostered within practiced. In particular, reflexivity that extends criticality, in other words, looking that the level of critique which facilitates sound judgements accompanied by action interventions which may inform public sector practice. For example, the use of art based methods, most notably, asking participants to draw their own conceptualisation of leadership and verbally providing an explanation helps participants to revisit and re-interpret their leadership stories. Antonacopoulou and Bento (2018), asserts that art based methods may help to "cultivate learners' creative potential" (p. 10). In addition, tapping into people's personal stories offers a more humanistic approach to exploring leadership within practice, and being reflexive as these intervention allows one to personalise and share their individual leadership journeys (Antonacopoulou and Bento 2018) for overall learning, critical reflection and improvements to business practice.

In line with Cunliffe and Jun (2005), reflexivity was embedded into practice by allowing participants to view self-reflexivity as a way of thinking about their own views and how others construct their reality around them, as a way to evoke change within the practice. For example, the Collaborative Inquiry Team was encouraged to journal their experiences and lessons

learned, and so forth. Likewise, the reflective pause technique (Coghlan and Brannick, 2010) was incorporated throughout this thesis as a way of demonstrating first-person inquiry.

Moreover, adopting principles from Etherington (2004), reflexivity was used throughout the research process as a mirror to ensure that conversations and the writing processes remained transparent, accurate and that it addressed any ethical issues that may emerge. For example, power relations between the researcher, participants being interviewed or the Collaborative Inquiry Team (Etherington, 2004). The incorporation of reflexivity within the research process provided an audit trail, showing transparency about how a researcher went about researching their practice to uncover what is known and how it is known (Etherington, 2004) through reflexivity, snapshots of this is captured in the accounts provided by the journal entries. Most importantly, however, Etherington (2004) argues that reflexivity contributes to the overall rigour and validity within research as it offers information about the context in which the data is situated.

Issues of validation and reliability principles, drawn from Heikkinen, Huttenen, Syrjala and Pesonen (2012), as seen on page 66 of this thesis, was established and sustained throughout the research process as seen in the problematisation, the methodology, data collection strategy, analysis and interpretation of the data, justification and transparency for decisions taken, data triangulation and member checks, and the co-construction of meaning, as viewed through the interactions with the interview interventions, and the action research cycle with the Collaborative Inquiry Team. Additionally, the quality and rigour of work produced in this thesis were achieved by borrowing from Coghlan and Brannick's (2010) framework, which worked in tandem with the aforesaid. Thus, under the action research remit, the research sought to illustrate three main elements, which was to tell a good story (explain and show what occurred within practice); provide thorough reflection on the story, and to extrapolate relevant knowledge (Coghlan and Brannick, 2010).

6.9 Explorations for Future Research

There are questions that still remain unanswered given time constraints. Thus, areas of questioning insight could delve deeper into the public sector practice by taking the underpinning ideological perspective of reflexivity; in particular, the broader issues involved with the reform agenda, and how does this impact public sector leadership from a social constructionist perspective? Notwithstanding, drawing on relational leadership lenses to make an informed view of public sector leadership, how could greater insight be gained by incorporating the private sector or non-profit organisation into the leadership variable? This would help to deepen understanding as it relates to working collaboratively and within a participatory framework on complex and interrelated national issues and policy development. Likewise, the continuation of the research over time, using dialogue and participatory action research could consider shared experiences, lessons learned, and what areas are still unknown. The PAR framework could be developed and utilised as a research tool for areas such as health policy development, cultural and heritage mapping, and social and educational research, where citizens can partner with government on national decision making. This, again, will add another element to understanding the dynamic and complex social interactions of public sector leadership from a citizen engagement model.

6.10 Reflections

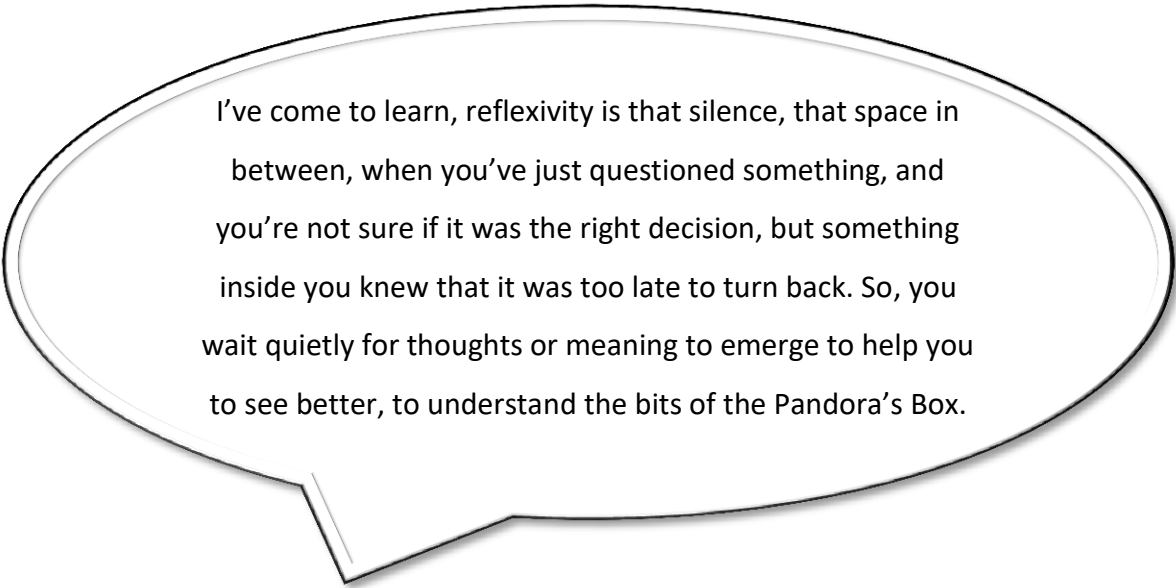
Working within the action research framework was a little disconcerting for both me as the researcher and the participants. This was primarily because the idea of reflexivity and PAR was a novel concept, which resulted in an acclimatisation phase, where the Collaborative Inquiry Team needed time to adjust. However, with constant engagement with the research project, the team and I delved deeper into concepts, such as communications, and how it could be used as a relational tool within the practice to encourage leaderful activity. Understanding how leadership is co-constructed within the spaces between dialogue and complex social responses, as seen with the push-pull flow of conversation, we learned that “living conversations and relations between people” are essential as it deepens insight, providing rich, thick meaning as to how we relate to each other (Cunliffe, 2011, p. 658). I would argue here

that we can develop meaningful working relationships, and gain a full understanding of how those relations can be negotiated and sustained over time through mutual respect and trust, which may allow leadership to emerge within everyday practice.

My development as a scholar-practitioner begins by reflecting on when I first joined the public service. I enthusiastically signed on to a profession with the underlying premise to make things better than I found them. However, over the years, I have come to recognise sometimes the hierarchical and bureaucratic system does not facilitate or create the room for leaderful organisations to thrive or for one to be leaderful. Often times the system can be too orderly, structured, technical, value-free, objective and rational. While there is room for governance mechanisms within a regulated environment, given the inherent nature of some of the public sector business, the way in which agencies engage with citizens is changing.

Having now undertaken research as a scholar-practitioner, I now view leadership differently. I am fuelled by a passion to ensure that knowledge learned on this journey is transferred to practice. There is value in the applicability of exploring leadership from a social constructionist relational approach. I now understand that inherent fears were preventing me from moving forward as a leader. The fear of change, of being labelled a technical expert, not conforming, and protecting a system that I serve, is propelling me forward on my leadership journey. Since conducting this research I have changed in that my worldview and approach to leadership has expanded.

I now look through relational analytically informed lenses for intrinsic weaknesses. I look for contradictions. I listen closely for what is said, and what is unsaid; I look for paradoxes to emerge. I am willing to disprove my espoused theories and my theories in use as a leader. My initial reluctance to change my leadership approach was based on ingrained assumptions, biases, values, and experiences. I have come to recognise the meaning of Plato's allegory of the Cave, now that I have been exposed to this new meaning of leadership, how do I go back to the old system and tell the others?



I've come to learn, reflexivity is that silence, that space in between, when you've just questioned something, and you're not sure if it was the right decision, but something inside you knew that it was too late to turn back. So, you wait quietly for thoughts or meaning to emerge to help you to see better, to understand the bits of the Pandora's Box.

Reflective box 7: Vignette –Being Reflexive.

Undertaking this research was challenging, but a fully rewarding, enriching and a transformative experience. This was partly due to having to change my own mind-set towards working within an innovative and unconventional approach. This was in direct contravention from the positivist scientific methods of learning that I have been socialised towards while undertaking other degree programmes. Engagement with this research project became a large sustaining factor in my life, which has taught me many valuable lessons and has opened doors of opportunities for me since undertaking this research. For example, inculcating new ideas about relational leadership practices presented itself in the implementation of a Toastmasters chapter for the civil service.

In reflection, the value of engaging with relational leadership theory for exploring public sector leadership was immense. Within everyday work practice, we live and interact with people as relational beings, and in hindsight, much of what we construe to be taken as acts of leadership could be nothing more than a superficial attendance to leadership. Heraclitus (535-475 BCE) using strident language, proffered that “no man can ever step in the same river twice”, for me, interactions with relational leadership principles on this research process could be described as being analogous to this statement. What this means to me is that change is

constant, therefore, when you attempt to step in the river and take your foot out, then you try to put your foot back in again, your foot may perhaps not return to the same place or spot. If we consider Heraclitus's belief in change and the fundamental law of the cosmos that everything is in a state of flux, the implication here is that the minute you stepped into the river, the water would have been displaced, and you would have experienced some sort of change from the experience.

Likewise, the Collaborative Inquiry Team and I had similar experiences as we interacted with the research area which left an indelible mark on us. The complex and dynamic social interaction that we engaged in through our daily conversations is continually changing, and as we undertake sense-making and sense-giving within our working context, we are embodying leadership experiences of becoming leaders rather than doing leadership. When we first commenced Coffee Morning Meetings, it was challenging, however, the novel idea of leadership being in relation to others (Cunliffer and Eriksen, 2011), exposed us to a different way of working. It created the space to begin to think more critically about how we work, and to ask those difficult questions about ourselves and our practice (Cunliffe, 2005). We have come to recognise that change first starts by looking at oneself; and as such, we are less likely to revert back to a posture of complacency and institutionalised behaviour.

At the heart of the working relationship is people, and how we interact with people is paramount to achieving sound working relationships. The use of dialogue is only one part of the puzzle explored in this thesis. Fitzsimons (2012) used the analogy of astronomy to depict the vastness of leadership as a discipline. The author went on to paint a picture for the readership that evokes an image, that the key to grasping the integral complexities of the universe resides in being open to the idea that learning is a process. Similarly, with the research undertaken in this thesis, the findings uncovered and the research questions addressed, it is only a very minute piece of the puzzle. However, when placed together with other pieces, it renders it very difficult to dispute that knowledge generated both for scholarship and practice is worthwhile.

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Ethics Committee on Research

Participant Information Sheet

1. Title of Study

Developing Relational Leadership within a Civil Service Entity: An Action Research Inquiry

2. Invitation Paragraph

You are being invited to take part in a research that is exploring how relational leadership theory could be operationalised within a modernised public service environment to assist the organisation in achieving its strategic objectives. To that end, understanding leadership experiences and how these experiences may help to influence leadership styles presents opportunities to explore current leadership practices.

Before deciding whether to participate, it is important for you to understand why the research is being undertaken and what it will involve. Please take some time to read the following information carefully. If there is anything that you do not understand or you would like to obtain more information, please feel free to ask and I would be happy to discuss this with you or provide you with additional details.

Participating in this research is voluntary and I would like to stress that you do not have to accept this invitation. You should only agree to take part if you wish to do so.

Thank you for taking time to read this information sheet.

3. What is the purpose of the study?

The purpose of this research is to make a contribution to how leadership is understood and enacted in the Cayman Islands Public Service. In particular, the research aims to extend our understanding of public

sector leadership, and to provide insight to organisational practice by exploring how relational leadership theory could be operationalised to help the organisation achieve its strategic goals.

In so doing; this research underscores important issues being faced by many public sector institutions which include concerns on the economic, environmental and social levels. Implications for the public service include issues surrounding enhanced productivity, increased accountability, meeting demands of citizens, and transitioning towards the information age. These issues may ultimately shape and determine policy decisions within the public service and by extension the local community. In efforts to meet such demands, this will call for leadership at all levels of the organisation.

Potential benefits of taking part in this research is twofold: (1) at the organisational level, resulting research outcomes has the potential to enhance effectiveness and, (2) at the individual level, you are provided with an opportunity to work collaboratively by sharing your valued knowledge and experiences, which are deemed pertinent to taking this research forward.

4. Why have I been chosen to take part?

You have been identified to participate because you are either a senior public sector leader, or you hold an important leadership position, both of which are invaluable in helping to shape the direction of how the public service is transitioning towards the knowledge era, particularly within a reform environment.

At the heart of this research is the concept of leadership and understanding how this is mobilised within a complex environment. The research considers your perspective, experiences and input to be essential to moving the research agenda forward.

All senior leaders of Ministries and Portfolios have been selected, in addition to other participants that hold leadership positions at the agency levels.

Your involvement is voluntary. There are no consequences if you decide not to participate, and you can withdraw at any time during the process without explanation. That said I am hoping to receive a high response rate to enable a holistic picture to be gained across the public service.

5. Do I have to take part?

You do not have to take part in this research, as participation is voluntary. However, if you wish to be involved, by volunteering to participate in this research, you are free to withdraw at any time without giving an explanation, and without incurring a disadvantage.

6. What will happen if I take part?

If you take part in the research, you will be asked to be interviewed, as this is the primary means in which data is being collected. This will enable a more comprehensive understanding of leadership to be gained.

The primary researcher is Josette Kimlon Lawrence, who will be responsible for conducting the interview. The researcher is engaged in conducting this research which is in part fulfilment for a degree

programme from the University of Liverpool. The researcher role undertaken in this study is separate and apart from the researcher's professional responsibilities.

Face-to-face, semi-structured interviews will be conducted by the researcher. It is anticipated that interviews will be no longer than one (1) hour in length, and it will take place at a location of your choosing, for example, your office.

Interviews will be recorded on a hand held audio recorder which will be later transcribed by the researcher. Once the interview has been transcribed, the audio recording will be securely destroyed.

Anonymity is ensured as data will be coded and participants given pseudonyms, every effort will be made to ensure that information given is not easily identifiable. You will have a chance to read the results after transcription has been completed.

Confidentiality is ensured as only the researcher will have access to all data, including any hardcopies or electronic files which will be kept on a password protected computer only accessible to the researcher. Any hardcopy data will be kept in a secure file drawer which only the researcher has a key to enable access.

You will receive a copy of the interview schedule in advance allowing you the opportunity to ask any questions, or to raise any concerns you may have.

7. Expenses and / or payments

There are no expenses and/or payment as participation is voluntary.

8. Are there any risks in taking part?

There are no anticipated risks in volunteering to participate in this research, but please let me know if you have any concerns.

Every effort has been made to ensure that confidentiality and anonymity are ensured, for example, participants will not be named in the research, nor will any details be used that could easily identify participants. Additionally, participants are given pseudonyms which will be used instead of participant's names.

You will also be given an opportunity to review and correct data collected from the interview after the transcribing process is complete.

9. Are there any benefits in taking part?

If you do decide to take part in the research, the perceived benefits include gaining a deeper understanding of leadership and the potential to improve the overall organisational effectiveness through your contribution. By working collaboratively, we have an opportunity to make a genuine difference to our organisational practice. This may have wider benefits in help to shape the way leadership is viewed and practiced within the public service.

10. What if I am unhappy or if there is a problem?

If you are unhappy, or if there is a problem, please feel free to let me know. You can contact me either by email (Kimlon.Lawrence@gov.ky), or by telephone on (345) 949-9809, and I will try to assist you.

If you remain unhappy, or if you have a complaint which you feel you cannot come to me with, then you should contact the Research Governance Officer at ethics@liv.ac.uk.

When contacting the Research Governance Officer, please provide details of the name or description of the research (so that it can be identified), the researcher(s) involved and details of the complaint you wish to make.

11. Will my participation be kept confidential?

If you decide to participate in the research, you will not be identified, named, nor will any details be used that could identify you. Any information you provide will only be accessible to me, and information will be kept on a password protected computer. Additionally, after the recorded interview has been transcribed, the audio recordings will be securely destroyed in accordance with destruction protocols under the National Archive and Public Records Law (2010 Revision). If you wish to withdraw from the research, your details will be deleted from the electronic hard drive, which includes deleting information from the 'rubbish bin'. Also, hard copies of any information will be securely shredded.

12. What will happen to the results of the study?

If you are interested, a summary of research findings will be made available to all participants. The findings from the research will be shared with the Deputy Governor. It is anticipated that the results will form part of a final thesis that will be submitted to the University of Liverpool in part fulfilment of the doctoral degree programme.

Data will be held for a period of at least five (5) years from the date when the research commenced. Data security and confidentiality will be preserved, in addition, only the researcher will have access to the data.

13. What will happen if I want to stop taking part?

If for any reason you no longer wish to take part in the research, you can withdraw at any time, without explanation. Results up to the period of withdrawal may be used, if you are happy for this to be done.

Otherwise, you may request that your data be destroyed and not used further. Results for this research will be anonymised, and withdrawal should take place prior to anonymisation. If you do decide to withdraw, for example, after being interviewed, all relevant data will be destroyed. For instance, files (electronic and hardcopies) will be deleted from the computer hard-drives, inclusive of deleting information in electronic 'trash bins'. Hardcopies will be destroyed and shredded securely in accordance with the National Archive and Public Records Law (2010 Revision).

14. Who can I contact if I have further questions?

If you have further questions or you would like more details, please feel free to contact Dr David Higgins via email on (David.Higgins@liverpool.ac.uk) and he would be happy to address any concerns you may have.

Appendix 2: Consent Form

Committee on Research Ethics

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Title of Research Project: Developing Relational Leadership within a Civil Service Entity: An Action Research Inquiry.

Researcher(s): Josette Kimlon Lawrence

**Please
initial box**

- | | |
|---|----------------------|
| 1. I confirm that I have read and understand the Participant Information Sheet dated [to be inserted] for the above research. I have had the opportunity to consider the information provided, ask questions and had them answered satisfactorily. | <input type="text"/> |
| 2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason, without my rights being affected. In addition, should I wish to not answer any particular question or questions, I am free to decline. | <input type="text"/> |
| 3. I understand that I can at any time ask for access to the information I provided and I can also request the destruction of that information if I wish. | <input type="text"/> |
| 4. I understand that confidentiality and anonymity will be maintained and it will not be possible to identify me in any publications. | <input type="text"/> |
| 5. I understand and I agree that once I submit my data it will become anonymised, and I will not be able to withdraw my data after such time. | <input type="text"/> |
| 6. I agree for the data collected from me to be used in relevant future research. | <input type="text"/> |
| 7. I agree to take part in the above research. | <input type="text"/> |

_____ Participant Name	_____ Date	_____ Signature
_____ Name of Person taking consent	_____ Date	_____ Signature
_____ Researcher	_____ Date	_____ Signature

Appendix 3: Interview Guideline

Student Researcher:

Name: Josette Kimlon Lawrence

Work Address: CINA, P.O. Box 10160, Grand Cayman, Cayman Islands, KY1-1002

Work Telephone: (345) 949-9809

Work Email: Kimlon.Lawrence@gov.ky

INTERVIEW GUIDE		
Interviewee IN: __/__/__ - 12 (e.g. M/EM/01-12 or F/CO/02-12)		
Research topic: Developing Relational Leadership within a Civil Service Entity: An Action Research Inquiry. Time interview commenced: _____ Time interview ended: _____ Date: _____ Place: _____ Interviewer: _____ Interviewee: _____		
Introduction		
<i>Topics to cover during introductory remarks:-</i> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Purpose of research 2. Goal of interview and expected duration 3. Explain what will happen with data collect and how it will benefit respondents (anonymity, confidentiality, data privacy, data security and right to withdraw). 4. Any questions or concerns? 5. Confirmation on consent form if not received already 		
Demographics and work history		
<i>Before we get started, can I ask you to confirm a few details to ensure that I have an accurate recording of your demographic details and work history:-</i> Position: _____ Highest education level: _____ Years worked in current position/leadership role: _____ Agency type: _____ Number of employees managed: _____ Level of involvement in policy development and decision making: _____ Age: ___ under 30 ___ 30-40 ___ 40-50 ___ over 50		
Topic	Questions	Notes
Leadership practices, style and experience	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. I am keen on learning more about your everyday work practice, so what do you do within your present role? 2. Tell me about your entity; what does it do well and what are some of the issues you are presently facing? 3. How do you deal with challenging people and tasks, and how do you go about delegating? Is it effective? How do you know that? 4. What has changed within your practice from the time you started in 	

	<p>your current role up until now?</p> <p>5. How do you feel about those changes?</p>	
Gaps in leadership	<p>6. Do you see yourself as a leader?</p> <p>7. To what extent has changes within the public sector influence your ability to lead?</p> <p>8. If you had to change anything about your work practice, would that be and why?</p>	
Leadership within a changing environment	<p>9. What are some of the challenges for public sector leaders in the 21st century?</p> <p>10. Could you tell me your thoughts on how sustainable are our approaches to public sector leadership?</p> <p>11. How do you go about balancing everything that you do, for example, the changing public sector needs, citizen demands for effective service delivery and achieving operational outcomes?</p> <p>12. If you had to give advice to someone new coming into the organisation to fill a senior role, what would that be and why?</p>	
Thinking more complex, complexity leadership, relational leadership.	<p>13. How do you feel about the modernised public sector context in which we currently work?</p> <p>14. What role does COs, HoDs, etc. play and how would you describe the environment in which they work?</p> <p>15. What skills and competencies should COs, HoDs, etc. have and what makes for effective leadership?</p> <p>16. Tell me more about what is it that</p>	

	<p>you expect from your peers, HoDs, or other people within similar roles?</p> <p>17. Tell me, within this present public sector context, could you draw an image of what you think a leader is and explain that picture to me?</p>	
<p>Closing question:</p> <p>18. Is there anything else you think may be important to understand public sector leadership that we have not talked about?</p> <p><i>Closing points to make:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Summarise • Ask if they would be open for a follow up interview, if required • Thank interviewee 		

Interview guide adapted from Creswell (2013, p. 165) and Chandler and Reynolds (2013).

Appendix 4: Interview Summary Sheet

INTERVIEW SUMMARY SHEET	
Interviewee IN: __/__/__ - 12	Interview date:
1. Description of the atmosphere and the context of the interview	
2. What were the main points made by the interviewee?	
3. What new information or insight was gained from the interview?	
4. Was there anything astonishing, if so, how did this affect my thinking?	
5. Was there any issues or concerns experienced (topic, questions, missing areas, etc.)?	
6. What was the main message taken away about public sector leadership? Any recommendations on interventions or specific actions?	
7. What would I do differently and why?	

Interview Summary Sheet - adapted from Chandler and Reynolds (2013).